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BENEATH HER STATION



“ A trace of concern crept into his face as he glanced at his wife, who lay somewhat languidly in a chair beside him.” (Chapter XIX.)

Beneath her Station

[Frontispiece

BENEATH HER STATION

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BENEATH HER STATION

I

DERRICK WELAND

THE November day was wearing through, and the drizzle outside dimmed the faint light which still crept into the room where Lieutenant Ormond lay in a big chair beside the hearth at Halton Grange. He was feeling comfortably drowsy, for he had spent most of the day tramping over sloppy meadows and dawdling round dripping covers in the raw wind, which, considering that he was not long home from the Tropics, was scarcely wise of him. Opposite him sat his sister Flora, and Millicent Gaskell, a relation of his on his mother's side. She was speaking softly in a clear low voice which fell upon the man's ears pleasantly. He admitted now and then that, although he did not always understand her, he liked to hear Millicent talk.

"Asleep again!" she said. "Tommy, you haven't heard a word we said."

Ormond looked up and laughed in a pleasant boyish fashion.

"I'm not sure I did," he said, "I was thinking."

"Isn't that risky?" said Millicent, "I mean when one isn't accustomed to it, you know. Still, if it wouldn't be too great an effort to express them, your reflections might prove interesting."

Ormond looked at her languidly with a twinkle in his half-closed eyes. "Well," he said, "I was just thinking how nice this is."

It was vague but comprehensible, coming from a man who had long faced the horrors of loneliness, and risked his life almost daily, in one of the most pestilential tracts of forest in tropical Africa, where even at noonday there is eternal shadow and the fever that slays the white man lurks in the evening mist. The blaze on the hearth had grown brighter and emphasized the cosiness of the little space where he and his companions sat between it and a great lacquered screen.

Millicent leaned forward in her chair, looking at Ormond with a little smile in her eyes. They were dark and clear with a curious luminous depth in them, and the hair coiled in a great knot upon the little shapely head was as deep in tint. The face beneath it was a delicate oval, a trifle pallid in colouring, though the lips were firm and red, and there was a suggestion of strength in it. It was also, since she had no expectations, her fortune, though she disdained to consider it as such, for Millicent Gaskell was, as Flora Ormond said, as yet afflicted with unrealizable aspirations.

Flora resembled her brother, in that she had the same brown eyes and hair, and there was nothing in any way noticeable about her. Indeed, nobody would have looked twice at Lieutenant Ormond, and he was chiefly esteemed in England for his careless good-nature and quiet humour, which was, however, usually free from wit. His friends, it was significant, invariably called him Tommy, and when he passed through Sandhurst with some credit to himself candidly admitted their astonishment. Yet there were in tropical Africa grim men with dusky faces, of Moslem faith, who believed in Thomas Ormond, and had more than once staked their lives upon that confidence.

"I wonder whether you could be a little more explicit?" said Millicent.

"Well," said Ormond, reflectively, "I'll try. I'm nicely tired; it's beautifully warm here, and you make a picture that's soothing for a tired man to look at sitting

yonder. Then in another hour or so there'll be dinner, and food that one can eat. You see, it's very different in Africa."

"One would have fancied that it was also warm enough in that country. What do you usually do there, Tommy?" said Millicent.

Tommy laughed indolently. "Lay down the law, chase rebellious niggers, take fever, and collect entomological specimens."

"That's a new hobby, Tommy," said his sister. "I never suspected you of a fondness for creeping things."

"The trouble," said Tommy, drily, "is that they are fond of me. When the lamp is lit I go round investigating with a cleaning-rod and the orderly collects them in the dust pail when I have done with them. Spiders as big as a small mouse, jiggers, and great mealy centipedes. You get very sick when some of them nip you. Still, I'm not going to talk about Africa. I get quite enough of it when I'm there, and Leslie Ormond is the only man I ever met who knew the country and could keep his remarks about it within the bounds of decency. He told me he was coming down to-night."

Flora made a little impatient gesture. "I'm sorry for Leslie, but he's an infliction now and then. It's too much of an effort to keep up to his level. But what about the two other men? Aren't you driving in to the station to meet them?"

"No," said Tommy, decisively, "I'm too cosy here, and now I think of it I've a twinge in my shoulder. One has to be careful when he's had malaria. As I believe I told you, Derrick Weland is a trader."

Flora turned to Millicent with a little affectation of dismay.

"And," she said compassionately, "he is going to take you in. According to Saint Leslie the traders are all abandoned men. Palm-oil-ruffians is, I believe, the generic name for them. They go about in big hats and pyjamas and drink rum, don't they, Tommy?"

"Gin is the favourite tippie in Western Africa," said Tommy, gravely. "I'm not going to make any excuses for Derrick Weland; you wait until you see him. Still, I want you both to be especially nice to him."

"Is there any reason why we should?" asked Millicent.

A little twinkle crept into Tommy's eyes. "I think," he said reflectively, "there are two. You see, a man who lives leagues away from anybody but niggers in the bush is apt to feel uncomfortable in the society of dainty young women. Then when I was down with the last fever he sat up all night for three weeks taking care of me. I was quite ill that time, and the outpost was forty miles from anywhere."

Flora's face softened, for Tommy was her only brother. "Then Weland was the man who saved your life? I know how ill you were, because Mrs. Halifax told us when she came home. Anybody else would have mentioned his name. But what about your other African friend?"

"He isn't exactly a friend of mine."

"Still, you asked him."

"No," said Tommy, a trifle drily, "I scarcely think I did. He was staying with the Nasebys and managed to persuade my too-hospitable father that I would be delighted to have him here. Still, it's not often you have an opportunity of entertaining royalty."

"Royalty?" said Millicent.

"He is an African prince, though that doesn't always mean a great deal in his country. Anyway, he dresses better than I do, knows all about law and medicine, shoots quite decently, and, so Eva Naseby says, sings divinely. Most of the confounded niggers do."

"And," said Millicent, "you don't like him!"

Tommy laughed softly. "It isn't wise to obtrude one's opinions upon other people, Milly dear."

Then a maid brought in the lamps, and they talked on other subjects until at last Tommy rose and moved

languidly to the door. It was an hour later and the big room was well tenanted when he appeared again with another man at his side. His eyes twinkled as he presented the stranger.

"Derrick Weland. My sister—Miss Gaskell," he said.

Flora Ormond wondered whether she had succeeded in concealing the astonishment she felt, for the man in no way resembled her preconceived notions of the West Coast trader. His hair was crisp and fair, his blue eyes had a little hard glint in them, and his face, which was a trifle too reposeful, suggested that he was one accustomed to command. There was also no trace of sensuality or hint of coarse living in it, and he held himself well, while the fashion in which the thin evening dress hung about him seemed to indicate that he had been accustomed to wearing it.

"I am moer fortunate than I expected, Miss Gaskell," he said. "I wonder if you will be astonished to hear that you are by no means a stranger to me."

"I do not remember having met you," she said.

"No," said Weland. "Still, I should have recognized you anywhere. That gong, however, evidently means dinner, and I understand I am to have the pleasure of taking you in."

Millicent laid her hand upon his arm, and as they moved along the great dark panelled corridor, Flora, turning from her companion, touched her 'brother's' shoulder.

"Tommy, why didn't you tell me? He's almost distinguished and makes a perfect foil to Millicent," she said.

Ormond laughed as he said, "I believe I told you he was a friend of mine!"

Millicent and Weland sat near the middle of the table, with a man in clerical attire almost opposite them. The latter's lean face was ascetic and curiously pale, a contrast to the ruddy, full-fleshed visage of the vicar of the

country parish, who sat not far away. He had a long high forehead shadowed by thick black hair, and his eyes, which were dark and closely set together, were singularly keen, while though evidently rather above the usual height there was just then a limpness in his pose which suggested indifferent health or nervous strain. He was a curate of a famous church in the iron-working town a few miles away, where his zeal, which was seldom tempered by discretion, and ritualistic tendencies had gained him popular dislike and suspicion.

"I wonder if you ever met Leslie Ormond in Africa," said Millicent, turning to her companion. "He had charge of a mission station there."

"No," said Weland, a trifle drily. "The missionaries have no dealings with the traders. Still, while we never saw each other I am well acquainted with his doings and believe my name is anathema to him. I was wondering whether he would take sherry, but I see the man is at least consistent."

"Consistent?"

Weland nodded. "The denunciation of the liquor traffic was his favourite hobby, and he made a rather healthy coast station almost too hot for him by indulging in it," he said. "The gin case, as it happens, is the standard currency in that country, and the Administration, having an eye to the revenue, didn't sympathize with him. Then he went up to Konnoto, which is more or less deadly, and stayed there in spite of the doctor's warnings, until they carried him down river, apparently with his sentence signed, too weak to protest."

"Still, in one sense, wasn't that rather fine?"

Weland saw the appreciation in the girl's eyes and smiled. "I must admit it, though I'm a trifle prejudiced. You see, I live by the gin trade."

Millicent flashed a swift and searching glance at him, and decided that this man had, at least, very little in common with the dissolute outcasts she had supposed the gin-traders to be.

"Have you been in that country long?" she said.

"Longer than most white men have an opportunity of remaining! Eight years, I think. I went out when I was twenty-one, and there are times when I feel sixty. Men grow old there somewhat rapidly."

"Thomas Ormond, at least, is as young as ever."

Weland smiled somewhat grimly. "You have never seen Tommy in Africa."

Then out of the hum of voices there rose one that was a trifle softer in modulation than the rest, and Millicent glanced across the table towards a man in immaculate conventional apparel whose face was a warm brown with a saffron tinge in it. His hair was crisp and curly, but it was also of undecided colour, and only the short thick nose and full protruding lips proclaimed the negro.

"How beautifully he speaks," she said. "Do you know Mr., or should it be Prince, Konnoto?"

Weland made a little gesture, as though to ask for silence, and the musical voice rose a trifle. "It is my firm belief that there are no limits to what the coloured peoples of Western Africa may attain," it said. "They have been stupefied by superstitions and ground down by sanguinary tyranny, but once the advantages of civilization are placed freely within their grasp there will be a startling exhibition of their capabilities."

Weland's smile grew a trifle more evident when the girl glanced at him inquiringly.

"His sentiments are commendable and by no means novel," he said. "Still, civilization will never permeate the people he talks about, though a few of them have already put it on as a veneer—skin deep. It chips off easily and then you see the primitive brutality."

Millicent noticed the sudden hardening of his face and fancied that some picture drawn by memory rose up before him, but he evidently shook the fancy off.

"Konnoto is a gentleman of polish and liberal education, an apparently devout Christian, and, as you hear,

a patriot. What else he may be I cannot tell. The African is always an uncertain quantity."

Before the girl could answer the voice rose again. "I am here in the meanwhile as a painstaking inquirer, but it is my purpose to return to my country sooner or later, and endeavour to civilize it, and frame for it a constitution on the British model. One would be well rewarded if a partial success crowned the arduous labours of a lifetime."

Ormond glanced at Weland, and Millicent saw his sardonic grin.

"Tommy's thoughts are evident—they generally are," she said. "Your views coincide with his?"

Weland smiled. "I fancy the man means it—just now, at least. Tommy is, however, accustomed to express himself less elaborately."

Then they were drawn into the talk of the others about them, and it was an hour later when Weland walked straight towards the lounge where Millicent sat alone for the moment, in a corner of the drawing-room, Konnoto, as it happened, was singing, and he sang excellently.

"You made a somewhat astonishing statement when you told me I was not a stranger to you," she said.

Weland smiled, but the curious little hard glint showed in his eyes. "Well, I will try to bear it out," he said. "There was a time when Tommy was very ill, and I came down to the outpost to take care of him. One hot night when he was rather worse than usual he insisted on turning out his writing-case to look for some letters, though it was clearly out of the question that he could read them. As it happened, he upset the case and a photograph fell out. It was a good picture, and there was a steadfastness and courage in the eyes that appealed to me. It was a long time since I had seen an English girl, and I was feeling low that night and very lonely. Tommy had been light-headed and couldn't talk to me. Well, I suppose it was liberty, but there were only a few negroes there and I put that photograph where I could see it in the long hot nights. It encouraged me."

A faint tinge of colour crept into the girl's face, but she smiled. "Then I am vicariously responsible for Tommy's cure," she said. "He would, we understand, have died without you."

The man made a little deprecatory gesture. "We have both had as severe attacks of fever before and got over them, but I am glad I met you. I wanted to thank you for your company during those anxious nights. I can tell you this because I am, from your point of view, an outsider, a gin-trader who is shortly going back to Africa. It is scarcely likely that when I leave here we shall ever meet again."

He turned away while Millicent considered her answer, and for the next half-hour talked to Flora, while late that night, when Konnoto and the other guests had gone, Thomas Ormond came upon his sister and Millicent together.

"Well," he said, with a twinkle in his eyes, "how did Derrick strike you?"

"I told you," said Flora. "Where did he get that style from?"

"Can any one get it?" said Tommy, dryly. "I have a kind of fancy it was born in him. Derrick, however, doesn't like questions. You were pleased with him, Milly?"

"I don't think I noticed any especially disagreeable shortcomings."

Tommy laughed. "Now I was thinking again—" he said.

"You shouldn't. It's a habit that will get you into trouble some day," said Flora, tartly.

"This time the thoughts were commendable. I was wondering whether we should drive over to church in Millthorpe on Sunday evening. The Mayor and Corporation attend in state, and Leslie's going to preach the sermon. The vicar's ill, so they had to let him. It isn't wise of them."

"Why shouldn't they?" said Millicent.

“ The Mayor’s a brewer, and everybody knows Leslie’s opinions. I’m willing to admit that he never attempts to hide them. Anyway, I’m going to hear him.”

Flora turned away with Millicent, who looked at her curiously as she said, “ Why should these men from Africa all meet here to-night ? ”

“ I don’t know,” said Flora. “ If there is any reason some of us or them will probably find it out in due time.”

II

THE FANATIC

It was a dismal night when the Halton dog-cart rattled through the Millthorpe streets. The big mare was steaming and spattered with mud, but Thomas Ormond laughed as he flung the end of his cigar away and tightened his grip on the reins.

“ Eight miles to one cigar—we have twenty minutes yet in hand,” he said.

“ It will not be too much,” said Flora, who sat at his side. “ I have seldom seen the streets so crowded. Keep your eye on Bronzewing, Tommy. She never liked a hand.”

The warning was timely, for the mare swerved suddenly as a roll of drums and the shrill notes of a bugle rang across the town, and there was a scattering of the crowd. The Mayor and Corporation went to church in state that night, with the volunteer battalion, workmen’s orders, and the fire brigade for escort, and the populace thronged the miry streets, though it was not a night to tempt any one who possessed it to leave a snug fireside.

Dingy, blackened houses flitted by, and still the glare of the dog-cart’s lamps flashed along the faces of the

close-packed crowd. They were, for the most part, curiously pallid, and all bore the stamp of toil, while some whose owners had empty pockets were drawn and grim.

Millicent Gaskell, who sat beside Weland on the back seat of the dog-cart, watched them sympathetically, and when they rattled through a sudden blaze of light turned to her companion.

"It must be some time since you have seen an English crowd," she said. "I wonder what you think of them."

Weland noticed the gravity in her eyes.

"Well," he said, reflectively, "they're not as exuberant as the dusky people I've been used to, or the Latins, but there's something in those faces that gets hold of one—I think it's the stability or tenacity. One would fancy that they had a hard contract on hand and were going through. I don't know that I'm expressing myself very lucidly, but the look I mean isn't new to me. I've seen it in the faces of young lads in the African factories who knew that another year or two of that work would make an end of them. Still, though they had fever every few weeks or so, they did what they came there to do, counting gin cases in sheds as hot as an oven or tallying-palm-oil puncheons in the scorching sun. They are, of course, dead by now, most of them, but the trade goes on."

Millicent looked up at him with a little gleam in her eyes. "Oh, I understand," she said. "It's all a struggle, everywhere."

"How should you know that?" asked Weland.

Millicent smiled curiously. "I have seen it. Trade has been slack, and you may know the significance of that in a town like this," she said. "We have been doing a very little to make it easier for some of them."

"You belong to a nursing guild or something of the kind? The latest hobby of young women of your station!"

Again Millicent smiled. "I shall probably take to it

as a vocation. One must do something, and I am not at Halton often. My status there is that of the poor relation."

Weland, for no apparent reason, felt a curious sense of content, though it was not astonishing that he did not express it.

"You have been acquainted with Leslie Ormond for some time?" he said.

"Yes. I have met him somewhat frequently, and I think he will convince you that the spirit you mention is not confined to men of any particular station. Leslie Ormond is, I fancy, going to preach himself out of his church to-night."

There was no opportunity for further questions because Tommy Ormond pulled the mare up before a hostelry in the market-place just then, and the party from Halton struggled through the crowd towards the church. It was already uncomfortably thronged, but Tommy was recognized by one of the sidesmen, who signed to him as they went up the aisle.

"If you will come with me to the chancel I think I could find you places among the choir stalls, but there is no room anywhere else," he said.

They went with him, and Weland found himself sitting among the dusky oak by Millicent's side and looking about him with an interest he had not expected. The haze and smoke had crept into the great building, and the clerestory was lost in shadow, though the gilded Gloria caught a ray of light and shone high up in the dimness above the west window. Below, the gas jets forced up the long rows of faces, and as he watched them the crash of music outside died away, and with a rhythmic tramp of feet men in scarlet uniform passed in file by file. Then came a little, puffy, red-faced man with a glittering chain about his neck, grave citizens with badges walking two by two, men with axes and gleaming helmets, and at last a brief silence that was broken by the sonorous tones of the great organ.

A moment later Weland felt his companion turn a little, for they were close together, and glancing across the chancel saw Konnoto sitting almost opposite him beside a fresh-faced girl.

"Mr. Konnoto has evidently come with the Nasebys. That's Ethel he's sitting by," said Millicent. "Until Tommy came down from London a few weeks ago Western Africa was almost an unknown land to me, and now I seem to be brought into contact with it continually. One would almost wonder if it was not more than a coincidence that you and Tommy, Konnoto and Leslie Ormond, should meet again, here of all places."

Then a curate rose, for there were two, and the service proceeded, while Millicent, glancing at her companion covertly, noticed the little dry smile in his eyes when Konnoto held out a book to the girl at his side. She was young, and her delicate prettiness seemed emphasized by the dusky face of the African, which was turned towards her. There was no apparent reason why they should not share one book between them, but Millicent fancied that Weland knew of one, and wondered what he was thinking. There were, she had been told, few English pastimes at which Konnoto did not acquit himself brilliantly, and it was also plain that he knew rather more of art and literature than the average Englishman, while she believed in Imperial unity, and, so far as she understood it, in the brotherhood of man. Yet there was, she seemed to feel, something incongruous in the fact that the dusky African and Ethel Naseby should read the liturgy of a Church which claims catholicism from the same prayer book.

The unpleasant sensation passed, and when Leslie Ormond ascended to the pulpit she sat very still. His face showed a curious pallor as the light of the flaring gas jets streamed upon it, but she noticed the glow in his dark eyes, and when he rose and crossed himself there was an impressive silence that seemed charged with expectancy in the great church. He stood very straight,

a lean, commanding figure, for almost a minute, looking down upon the long rows of faces.

"Now," said Thomas Ormond, softly, "it's company front!"

Weland heard him and understood, but next moment Leslie Ormond flung up one arm, and his voice was strained and hoarse as "Am I my brother's keeper?" rang out.

Millicent fancied that she had heard the introduction handled more effectively, and that she noticed a trace of impatience in Weland's face. She glanced at him with a little smile as she said, "Wait!"

Then the preacher's voice sank to a deeper tone. "Its wearer alone knows the pinch of the shoe, and there is often a bitterness the closest friend may fail to guess in our lives," he said. "Still, no man who moves about this town with discerning eyes can fail to realize the grimness of the struggle which in times like these most of you must wage. It is a struggle which one fears will grow more intense and pitiless, for there are many hungry, and but little bread, and, in spite of loud profession, the strife is not tempered by the precepts of Christianity, which alone can make sure equity between man and man, and teach the stronger to be merciful. Closing mills, blown-out furnaces, bitter weather, winter coming on, we who live in Millthorpe know what that means too well. Capital arrayed against labour, labour organized, the rights of the individual, and the weak and wounded trampled on!"

"Then who dare blame those that ask is all you teach us in this building a dream, or is it the will of the Lord that men with trained brains and muscles should starve, or herd with their toil-worn wives and sickly children in filthy tenements where decency is out of the question? We cling to the hope that the answer must be no. It is man's lust and greed that is responsible, and in human hands lies, at least, a part of the remedy.

"Consider the causes. The wares you make are barred

out by foreign duties. You are beaten in open markets by bounty-fed industries, but this as individuals you cannot control. You must look to your statesmen for a remedy, and whether they may, in seeking it, bring a worse thing upon you I do not know. Still, is there nothing you can do? Can you not provide against the day of adversity when trade is brisk and lay by the money that is squandered on gambling, and still worse spent in drink, since that does more than claim too great a portion of the yield of your industry?

"Which of you does not know how the mills run on Black Monday, and it is not the quarter-days thrown away that count the most, but the five hundred men who wait for the slack fifty, and the thousand for the eighty, while the boilers blow off and the rolls grind slow. Charge the cost of that, and the goods condemned defective across the sea, on your output, and wonder why the American, who comes to his work clear-eyed and alert fifty-two Mondays in the year, is leaving you behind.

"Then, one asks, can we avoid temptation, living as we do close-packed in reeking alleys with the liquor shops everywhere? It is, at least, terribly difficult, and for that the men who fatten upon their brothers' ruin are responsible. Still, is it necessary that the temptation should be cast in your way, and are you willing to live in homes fouler than those of the heathen for another man's profit? You have a civic constitution and there is a responsibility on those you appoint to rule. The rates you pay are heavy, and is it fit that the corrupt official and the bribing contractor should get the benefit, that the land you must have for improvements should be doubled in value by chicanery, and the men whose licensees break the law direct your local politics?"

Weland, who saw a portentous patch of crimson in the preacher's cheek, glanced down the crowded church. There was attention in the faces, astonishment in some, languid concurrence, and here and there derisive in-

credulity, but very little more until he glanced towards the cluster of civic dignitaries. Then the little sardonic smile crept back into his eyes, for the Mayor was a brewer, and his face was hard and grim, while the expressionless rigidity of those about him betrayed them.

Still the preacher proceeded with an unfaltering candour that availed him more than fervid eloquence. The men who listened knew that he was as well acquainted as they were with economic conditions, and when at last the hoarse, strained voice ceased abruptly there was a curious sound in the church. It suggested the stirring of a great assembly as the tension that had held it still relaxed. Then Leslie Ormond came down the pulpit stairway, and Weland noticed that the hand he laid on the carved oak of his stall when he sat down was quivering. In another ten minutes Derrick and Millicent were moving slowly down the aisle, and when they passed out through the porch the girl glanced at her companion.

"What did you think of that?" she said.

"One would fancy that it was true. Anyway, I couldn't controvert it. I live in Africa, you see."

"That is not what I mean."

"Then," said Weland, dryly, "the man's courage would have impressed me more if I hadn't been already acquainted with Leslie Ormond's capabilities. They have been exerted for the benefit of myself and other traders at the Government House of a certain African settlement. He should have lived in the time of the flagellants—and yet I don't think that is quite a fitting simile."

"No?" said Millicent, inquiringly.

"The flagellants whipped themselves, you see."

"And you believe Leslie Ormond is only capable of whipping other people?"

Weland shook his head. "I'm not sure I would go quite so far," he said. "The man speaks almost too feelingly, and he may, at least, have a hair shirt of his own."

Millicent smiled a little. "I should not wonder if he is quivering under the lash just now," she said.

As it happened, Ormond was then standing in front of the infirm vicar, who sat huddled beside the vestry fire watching the younger man with a curious expression in his face.

"It is a very distasteful thing to mention, but I sincerely deplore your rashness to-night," he said.

Ormond looked at him wearily. "There is not a word I would retract, sir," he said.

"No," said the vicar dryly. "Nobody would expect it from you. Still, in times like these, when we have so many detractors, is it advisable to cast reproach upon our strongest supporters?"

"Advisable?"

"Your point is, of course, plain. Still, there are many ways of leading back the erring, and you will find when you reach my age that the whip and spur are not the most expedient. There is also another question which—unpleasant as it is—I must raise. You have seen the offertory?"

Ormond's face flushed and he stared at the vicar almost incredulously.

"Are there men who would restrict their offerings because they were told an unpalatable truth?" he said.

"I am afraid there are a good many," said the vicar, with a little dry smile. "One must, however, remember that it is a trifle difficult to persuade any man of the truth of what he does not wish to believe in."

"Still, even if my views had been horribly incorrect?"

The vicar made a little gesture. "We have to accept human nature as it is and not expect too much from it, and while you may have felt convinced that your attack upon institutions and conditions which most men regard at least with toleration was warranted, the results of it—which we are compelled to consider—are deplorable. As you are, of course, aware, we had hoped the contributions usual on this visitation would have relieved the

wardens of considerable anxiety. You may, however, not know that I am very much afraid a cheque for a considerable amount which I had almost counted on will not be forthcoming now."

There was no trace of contrition in Ormond's face, which grew a trifle hard.

"The deference I owe you, sir, makes it difficult for me to answer," he said.

"We will dispense with it for the present," said the vicar, dryly. "Indeed, I am not sure that it has ever been especially evident."

"Then I should find it difficult to believe that it is admissible to palliate abuses whose effects we have to grapple with every day, in order that those who grow rich by them may relieve us from financial necessity. Is our toleration to be bought with a bribe?"

A tinge of darker colour showed in the vicar's cheeks, but his voice was even and curiously incisive.

"It would, it seems to me, be the duty of a young man who held views which did not coincide with those of men of known integrity and station to, at least, endeavour to make certain that they were warranted," he said. "The assuredness which comes from years of observation and reflection is entitled to respect, but the other kind, it is evident, may be largely the result of vanity or shortsightedness. There are very few hastily formulated theories which will bear the test of time."

"Still, every man has intuitive perceptions of right and wrong, and must act as they direct him."

"When they warn him of the wrong others are doing he would do wisely to temper them with charity. It is by no means difficult for an enthusiast to deceive himself, and, as I mentioned, we have now to grapple with several unpleasant facts. Our activities are hampered by straitened funds, while one generous donation we had counted on will go past us, and the offertory this evening cannot amount to more than half what it was on the last occasion. These are, unfortunately, certainties. That

being so, I must ask you to exercise the greatest discretion both in your work and in the pulpit, and especially to avoid any unconsidered action that may cost us the good-will of our friends."

"I am afraid I cannot promise to refrain from doing what I feel is imperatively necessary," said Ormond, wearily.

The vicar sighed. "Then in the meanwhile I can only thank you for your candour. I am not well to-night, and when I have been able to consider the position we will discuss it again."

Ormond, saying nothing, held up the vicar's hat and coat, and when the latter went out sat down staring at the fire. The position was already tolerably plain to him, and his retirement appeared the one solution of the difficulty.

The church was very silent, the room grew chilly, but still Ormond sat, huddled a little, in his chair by the dying fire, until the footsteps of the verger rang hollowly through the dusky building, and he rose when the man came in.

"You had them on the hip, sir," he said. "It would ha' counted a good five hundred votes if there'd been a 'lection on. Still, it's easy seeing there's something wrong with you to-night."

Ormond looked at him with a little grim smile.

"I suppose we all have our worries now and then," he said, and went out, walking somewhat listlessly, as the verger noticed, into the drizzle.

III

FICKLE AFFECTION

IT was after dinner when Weland and Millicent Gaskell sat side by side in a nook of the big fernery just outside the north window of Flora Ormond's drawing-room. There were advantages attached to the position, because

while they were almost invisible themselves they could see most of the lighted room behind them, and the aisles between the shadowy rockwork of the fernery, and Weland, at least, was not especially pleased when Flora Ormond sat down close beside them.

"It is really a convenient place. Nobody can see one," she said with a smile that was almost too meaningless. "That is why I am here. You will understand it when I tell you that Naseby has been talking to me for half an hour about land draining. My companions fled and left me at his mercy. Do you know where they have gone to?"

"Tommy went by five minutes since," said Weland. "He told me he purposed to make the fountain go or destroy the thing. In fact, he seemed almost unnecessarily determined about it."

"Tommy's made like that, though one wouldn't think it," said Flora, reflectively. "I suppose you didn't see Ethel Naseby and Konnoto. What are you smiling at, Mr. Weland? I wanted to make him sing, you know."

Weland looked down at a little fern. "What do you call that one, Miss Ormond?"

"Do you really want to know?" and Flora laughed. "You have quick perceptions, Mr. Weland, but they would be more use to you if you knew how to hide the fact. I expect that's how Tommy gets on with the niggers in Africa. They think he's a fool, and he isn't. That is, not very frequently. Still, I'm going to be candid. What is wrong with Mr. Konnoto?—I don't mean that he hasn't a nice colour, because everybody can see it."

"I am not aware that there is anything."

"Then I must try to tell you what I mean. He is a good shot, sings better than most amateurs, plays billiards decently, and can talk intelligently about almost anything; but now and then he does a trifling thing, or sinks his voice suddenly, and you want to get away from

him as though he had given you a glimpse of quite another kind of man."

Weland nodded, "He probably had," he said dryly. "It's a characteristic of most civilized niggers. The feeling is not unknown to me."

"Well," said Flora, "I'll tell you about the fern."

Weland turned his eyes obediently, but not before he had seen the dusky man he had already been watching lay his hand upon the arm of a young English girl, who by her attitude seemed to be smiling up at him. The two figures vanished amidst the shadows of the rockery, but, though there was no apparent reason for this, Millicent, who had not seen them, noticed that Weland set his lips.

"I wonder if you have ever seen the under side of the African nature given free vent?" she said when Flora had completed her lecture.

"I have," said Weland dryly. "I don't want to remember it. There was once a big native rising not far from the Konnoto country. The niggers burnt out a mission station and two or three factories."

"Did they molest yours?"

"No," said Weland. "There was a Ju-Ju on my place, you see."

Millicent wondered what a Ju-Ju was, but before she could frame the question Tommy Ormond came up with dripping cheeks and a dark flush in his face.

"It splashed me all over, but I made it go," he said. "I'm going to dry myself and get a soda."

He passed, on and Flora smiled at the rest. "Now I wonder what has put Tommy out, because, of course, it isn't the fountain," she said.

She moved away presently, and neither of the two left behind seemed disturbed by the fact. They had fallen into the habit of sitting together in lonely places, and nobody, at least so Weland fancied, had noticed it. It appeared, however, that Flora had not gone very far. for by and by Weland moved a trifle abruptly as he

heard Konnoto, whom he could not see, say, "Will you sit still a minute, Miss Ormond, I have something to tell you?"

Weland looked round and, as it happened, met Millicent's dark eyes.

"I don't think there is any necessity for us to go away," she said.

"I was afraid there would be," said Weland. "I didn't want to go."

They sat still, and though what Flora said was not audible Konnoto's voice reached them clearly.

"I feel that I can claim your sympathy, Miss Ormond, I have just had a blow which has blighted the dearest hopes of the last three weeks," he said. "It is more than likely that you have seen and appreciated my devotion to Miss Naseby. Now, I have stayed with Naseby the time mentioned and my wishes must have been apparent, since it is most unlikely that any man would have listened to his discourses on field drains every night without a strong motive. Emboldened by these reflections, I have just offered Ethel Naseby my hand and my possessions."

Flora Ormond's observations were not audible, though they heard Konnoto say, "But I will be a king."

Then Weland heard Flora ask, "What did she answer?"

"She didn't answer," said Konnoto, "that is, it was almost a minute before she did, and in the meanwhile she looked at me very curiously. 'You can't be serious,' she said.

"I told her I had never been so serious in my life, and then she smiled in a most unpleasant fashion. 'Oh, it's too absurd!' she said."

"Now," said Weland, quietly, "I know why Tommy was so vexed with the fountain."

"What I want to know is why when a man asks you to live and shoot with him it would be preposterous to think of marrying his daughters?" said Konnoto. "Naseby is as poor as church mice and I have lots of

money and will be a king. Of course, one can only submit here, but Ethel Naseby might have been made to change her mind in my country."

Konnoto was apparently sympathized with and sent away, and in another minute a girl, who held herself very straight, started as she passed Weland and his companion. Her lips were set together and there was a portentous brightness in her eyes, but she looked at Millicent steadily.

"Yes," she said, "I'm very angry."

She swept by them, and by and by Tommy came up.

"Still here!" he said with a twinkle in his eyes.

"I've got over my disgust at the fountain now."

Weland laughed, and since there were sufficient people in the room behind them they sat where they were for half an hour or rather more. Then Tommy swung round with disconcerting abruptness.

"Well," he said, "may I be hanged! The brute's after the other now."

"Tommy!" said Flora, warningly, "this really isn't a barrack square."

"It wasn't half what I meant," said Tommy, doggedly.

Then an explanation became unnecessary, for Konnoto appeared where a little light streamed down into the fernery, pursuing the younger Miss Naseby with outstretched arms. He was also speaking volubly, though they could not hear what he said, and next moment the two vanished again amidst the rockwork. Then there was a crash and a girl who sprang out from an opening made for the window. Before she reached it Flora Ormond stepped forward and barred her way.

"You can't get past, Eva," she said. "Now where is Mr. Konnoto, and what is the meaning of this?"

"He fell over the big watering-pot and I hope he has killed himself," she gasped. "Let me go on, Flora!"

"In a minute," said Flora, dryly. "In the meanwhile I really can't help thinking that you owe me a word or two of explanation."

It evidently cost the girl an effort to restrain her laughter.

"It's too absurd, but it's not my fault," she said. "He wanted to make love to me, and when I couldn't stop him I ran away. I had to remember I'd put my hair up or I'd have thrown a big fern at him."

"I told your father you had been released from discipline too soon," said Flora, sardonically.

"Well," said the girl, with her eyes sparkling and the colour deepening in her cheeks, "you have never been nearly kissed by a black man. Oh, he's coming!"

Flora let her pass, and Lieutenant Ormond rose up with a leisureliness which did not deceive Weland at least.

"I think I had better go and see if Mr. Konnoto has hurt himself," he said.

He disappeared amidst the ferns and the rest conversed sedulously. There was more than one entrance to the fernery, and half an hour had passed when Ormond came back again. He smiled at them reassuringly as he sat down.

"Has the man gone?" said Flora.

"He has," said Tommy, with a significant laugh. "Ten minutes after I had persuaded him that it would be advisable to do so, Naseby came up swelling with outraged dignity and holding himself as stiff as a poker.

" 'You will excuse me, Ormond, I am going to take the girls home,' he said to my father. 'With your son's permission I placed your dog-cart at Mr. Konnoto's disposal. He has, I believe, already started for Millthorpe.'

"Of course the major appeared astonished and asked questions, while I don't think Naseby even noticed that I was there."

" 'Mr. Konnoto took exception to one or two observations I felt compelled to make,' he said. 'He has done me the honour of proposing to two of my daughters in the same ten minutes, and I feel bound to admit I am only astonished he did not offer to marry them both at

once. Such proceedings are no doubt not unusual in his country. I shall, however, endeavour to make my son understand how I appreciate his kindness in sending the man down to me.”

“I fancy Reggie Naseby will feel sorry he did it,” said Flora, reflectively.

The girls went away, and Tommy, who lighted a cigar, glanced at Weland. “Of course it’s in the brute,” he said. “I don’t think I ever felt more sorry about anything in my life than I did that I couldn’t let myself out when I came upon him just now. Some big people who ought to have known better had been petting him in London, and Reggie Naseby wouldn’t be warned by me. Anyway, you will be glad you are clear of the condemned country. You got that appointment in Burma?”

“No,” said Weland, quietly. “I could have done, but at the last minute I threw it up.”

“I suppose you had reasons.”

“I’m going back to Sapolto.”

“Going back!”

Weland nodded. “The Company have increased their capital and offered me better terms if I would reconsider my decision and try to push the trade into the Konnoto country,” he said.

“Still, the Burmese offer was a reasonable one, and there’s no comparison between the countries. You haven’t come to the reason yet.”

Weland smiled in a curious grim fashion. “I had a letter from Blower and he seemed to smell trouble. It appears that Konnoto is getting very shaky, and when he drops off Kwaka will endeavour to get the whole up-river country under his control. I think he could manage it. Konnoto was too liberal in his views for the Ju-Ju wire-pullers.”

“Yes,” said Tommy, reflectively, “I think he could. Anyway, the Konnoto niggers would do what he did. Still, what has that to do with you?”

“With the increase and commission on the new

trade what I should now get would be quite a respectable salary."

"That be hanged!" said Lieutenant Tommy.

Weland laughed. "Well, you have heard about the long-standing difference between Kwaka and the agent in charge of the Sapolto factory. It descended with his Ju-Ju from Custine to me. Blower said the Ju-Ju men were sending round the tokens again and working up a mutiny. There's going to be trouble, Tommy."

"Custine died before I came out. Suddenly, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Weland, grimly. "It was also the usual thing. The Ju-Ju is only warranted to keep off spear heads and flintlock guns, you see. He came up the verandah steps one evening with the perspiration dripping off him and his face all awry. 'The devils have got me this time,' he said."

"You believe he was right?" said Ormond, whose face grew suddenly stern.

"Of course. I spent two horrible hours with him that night. They meant it to hurt. Custine was a hard man, but he screamed, and once when I was getting more morphine he pushed the point of a paper file into his hand. He told me it was a relief to feel the pain of it, while when at last he got his leave I sat down and shivered and wondered if my nerve would ever come back again. Still, there was a good deal to be done, so I got a dose from the medicine chest and dragged myself into the compound. One of the country boys had gone, of course the last one I expected, and I took one Kroo with me only and started. It was evident the man would head for Kwaka's town but as he had to work round a village where they didn't like Kwaka we came up with him in the morning. What happened then wasn't pleasant, but it was necessary."

The good-humoured Tommy Ormond nodded tranquilly, for he knew that in the swamps of Kwaka's country mercy is deemed pusillanimity and the white

man's safety lies in the preservation of his prestige. "Of course," he said, "it had to be done!"

"One cartridge!" said Weland. "I don't think it hurt him. Then I sent him on to Kwaka and we got Custine decently put away that evening."

"I don't think you have shown me that you have any great inducement to go back to Sapolto yet," said Tommy, reflectively.

"I fancy I have. Custine's face sticks in my memory, and if that is not enough you know what Kwaka and his Ju-Ju people think about the Sapolto factory."

"He must have got his ten per cent. on all the oil and gum and rubber in the back country until your people provided the bushmen with a market," said Tommy. "Half the rows in Africa spring from disputes in trade. Still, if the company had sent any one but you and Custine to Sapolto they'd certainly have thrown away their money. Most of the niggers wonder how the place has stood so long, and it was a big thing Custine did when he got hold of the Ju-Ju. So Blower believes we'll have trouble! Well, as it happens, I do too, but, as usual, nothing will persuade our people on the coast. In fact, they pointed out that it was not advisable for a very young constabulary officer to worry about affairs that did not concern him when I tried to reason with them."

"I wonder," said Weland, looking round at the big fernery and brilliantly-lighted drawing-room, "why you left the line regiment and went out there? Of course it's an indiscreet question."

Tommy smiled somewhat wryly. "Well," he said, "the mess liked to do the thing thoroughly and the pace they made was hot, while for most of a year I scarcely landed a winner or had a good hand at cards. The Halton Ormonds never had very much of their own, you see, and a lawyer cleaned most of the inside out of my mother's settlement property. It takes my father all he knows to keep Halton going, and I told him garri-

son duty didn't suit me. A man can't spend his pay in Kwaka's country. Still, I'm not yet quite as sure as I would like to be why you're going back to Sapolto."

Weland laughed. "It's six years since I went there, and Kwaka, and I have spent a good deal of them watching each other's game. How long he and Custine had done the same thing before me I don't quite know, but soon after the trouble started one of the Ju-Ju men, no doubt with a purpose, predicted that Kwaka would never be secure while there was a white man in Sapolto factory. The white man, it was evident, would not be safe either. Now Kwaka is apparently going to come out of his shell and warm up the country, it's in a fashion incumbent on me to play out the hand."

Tommy Ormond nodded, for he knew, as Weland did, that while the supine administration persisted in believing there would be tranquillity, he and the trader constituted a big country's sole and very indifferent defence against the horrors of a native rising.

They rose and went back into the lighted room, and while Weland was sitting by Millicent and Flora, Leslie Ormond came in. His face was a trifle haggard and there was a suggestion of weariness in his attitude when he sat down near Flora.

"Aren't you well, Leslie?" said the girl. "I'm afraid your ultra-Protestant ironworkers have been worrying you again. You will keep treading on their pet toes, you know. Stay here and get a little peace for a week at least."

"I expect to stay a month," said Leslie. "In fact, until I go back to Africa."

"To Africa! But a malaria country doesn't suit you. Besides, what would the vicar do?"

Leslie smiled a little. "I scarcely fancy that it suits any white man, and the vicar will have no difficulty in getting a man with what he considers more tolerant views. I have asked to be relieved of my duties and written the society offering to go back to Africa."

Flora appeared concerned. "You and the vicar have had what Tommy calls a row. Can't you patch it up?" she said. "You really shouldn't insist on trifles. For my part I never could understand why there should be any particular spiritual efficacy in a candle. A good electric light is ever so much nicer. Besides, you see, he is the vicar."

Ormond stood up. "I'm afraid you mean to stick pins in me, Flo, and I think I'll go across to your father. I had better tell him."

He moved away and Flora shook her head compassionately. "If he had only been sensible he could have had a very nice time at Millthorpe and married two thousand a year," she said.

"Still," said Millicent, quietly, "it is perhaps a good thing that there are such men."

"I don't know," said Flora. "They are now and then horribly difficult to get on with. I'm fond of Leslie, and yet I think if we had lived a long while ago and I couldn't agree with all St. Athanasius said he would have been quite willing to burn me. I prefer easy-going men like Tommy and Derrick Weland."

Millicent was quite aware that Flora was watching her, and she smiled a little.

"Are you quite sure that Tommy is easy-going?" she said. "Of course I have seen very little of Derrick Weland, but I fancy he and Tommy are in one sense not very unlike Leslie Ormond."

IV

KONNOTO CONSOLES HIMSELF

"WHAT is a Ju-Ju, Tommy?" said Millicent Gaskell.

"I really don't know. You see, it may be anything," he answered.

"Tommy seldom does know," said his sister.

Tommy laughed good-humouredly. "Then if you really want to find out what a Ju-Ju is you can ask Derrick. He has got a rather famous one."

Weland glanced at Millicent, who sat on the opposite side of the hearth.

"Tommy is right," said Weland, seeing the girl expected an answer. "Anything may be made a Ju-Ju in Western Africa. A nigger who wishes to leave his property safe will get a little bunch of rags dipped in blood from a Ju-Ju man, or fetich priest, and tie them to a stick in front of his hut, and not a man in the country would venture to crawl into it. To plait up tufts of grass in a certain fashion is almost as efficacious, and there are little bits of ivory and wood, and other trifles, which will ensure your good fortune or preserve you from wounds or fever."

Tommy nodded. "That's about it," he said. "All of them don't work, but there's no doubt that some of them do, and you can't buy one of that kind with money."

"Absurd!" said Flora. "You ought to know better, Tommy. Now, I thought a Ju-Ju was a spirit."

"So it is," said Weland. "Usually a malevolent one. But while there are very few white men who can make head or tail of West African mythology, it seems that the deity is willing to diffuse itself considerably, and now and then becomes incarnate in a man, a king most frequently, and abides with the dynasty. It can also be induced to embody itself in sticks and woven grass, rags and stones, or at least I fancy that is the niggers' notion. A good many of our difficulties spring from the belief."

"Tommy told us you had a Ju-Ju," said Millicent.

Weland laughed as he took out a little leather case from which he extracted what appeared to be a mat of woven fibres with a bead sewn in it. Leaning forward he laid it in Millicent's hand.

"That is a Ju-Ju of special efficacy," he said. "The

bead is an agгри, and while I scarcely think anybody quite knows what an agгри is, they're almost priceless in Western Africa. This one has kept the Sapolto factory standing and opened a wide tract of forest to British trade, though there are disasters its owner is not warranted against."

Tommy nodded gravely. "Of course you think it's tomfoolery, but it isn't," he said.

"How did you get the Ju-Ju?" asked Millicent.

"Custine, the agent I succeeded at Sapolto, gave it me when he was dying. He won it from King Kwaka's Ju-Ju man in a trial of magic soon after he opened the Sapolto factory. Now some of the feats the Ju-Ju men perform are sufficiently astonishing, and if they only trick you into believing that they do them it evidently comes to much the same thing, so Custine, who was a resourceful man, decided, after several attempts had been made to put an end to him, that he must make a reputation of the same kind if he was to keep alive. That was why he set up as a magician too, and gave King Kwaka and his retainers an exhibition of sleight of hand, and as a climax put the Ju-Ju man to sleep. I don't quite know how he arranged it, and I fancy the doctor at a down-river station suggested it, but he used chloroform."

There was a little laughter and Tommy languidly raised himself.

"It's a horrible nuisance, but I've a letter to write," he said. "I want you to tell me how to answer Mrs. Poltreven, Flo. She's touchy, but I'm certainly not going there to play *bélique* for four hours at a sitting again!"

The last was almost too evidently an inspiration, and Millicent, at least, saw the little smile in Flora Ormond's eyes as she went out with her brother. Still, she sat where she was, while Weland rose and stood leaning on the great carved mantel while he looked gravely down on her.

"I'm going away to-morrow," he said, and there was a faint vibration in his voice which did not escape the girl's attention.

"The life we lead here does not appeal to you?" she said.

Weland smiled almost grimly. "I'm afraid it appeals too much, and that is partly why I am going at once. There is, however, work waiting for me in Africa."

Millicent looked at him quietly, and the man's face seemed to grow a trifle harder as he met her gaze.

"Yes," she said, "I understand. Tommy told me. It is, I think, what one would have expected from you."

Weland made no disclaimer, which pleased his companion, since she felt that his reticence was not due to vanity.

"You have known me a very little while," he said.

"Ten days, I think,"

Weland laughed. "Well," he said reflectively, "I have known you for at least a year, and yet I fancy my acquaintance with you was consummated in a few seconds while I held your picture in my hand. I can remember that evening well. The damp was trickling down the walls of the outpost, the heat was almost intolerable, Tommy was muttering in delirium, and I had one of those fits of black dejection which white men get in that country. Then I looked at the picture and felt myself a cur. Tommy, I knew, would die unless I roused myself, and I wanted to lie down and let what couldn't be helped come about. One feels now and then that effort is useless in Africa. I had the fever on me too, but I felt when I saw the picture that if I let the weakness master me and ever met you afterwards I should not dare to face your eyes."

A very faint tinge of colour crept into Millicent's check, for the man's sincerity was evident, and she realized that while he would not have offered it as such she had never yet had such a compliment paid to her.

"And," she said with a little smile, "Tommy is

certainly alive. It doesn't seem to have occurred to him that he owes anything to me. Still, I am pleased that I met you. It will release both of us from any further responsibility."

A little gleam crept into Weland's eyes, but he laughed. "I meant all I told you, but it is only because I am going away to-morrow and shall in all probability never see you again, that I have ventured so far. Just now I want to thank you for your graciousness to me."

He turned away with a curious abruptness, as though afraid to say too much, and Millicent sat still, touched a little, gazing at the fire. She was still sitting there when Flora came back and smiled at her.

"Tommy managed to do without me," she said. "He is delightfully transparent now and then."

"Mr. Weland did not stay long," said Millicent. "He only wished to express his appreciation of the fact that we had not held him off at arm's length, but he did it rather nicely. He is not exactly what one would have expected from Tommy's picture of the typical trader."

It was a few weeks later, and about eight o'clock at night, when the two men stood on the steps of their hotel in a certain manufacturing town.

"We might almost as well have gone on to Liverpool, but I don't like getting into places in the middle of the night," said Ormond. "Still, it's almost as big a nuisance to get up in the morning, and if you are to catch your steamer you'll have to start early. Nothing on at any of the theatres to-night, but there's a rather famous variety show not far away. We may as well look in for half an hour or so."

Ten minutes later they were standing under the glass verandah of a great building blazing with lights when a cab which drew up splattered Tommy with mire. He touched Weland's arm when a man got out.

"It's Konnoto," he said.

Weland turned in time to see the man, whose back was towards him, hand a girl out of the cab.

They passed in, and proceeded, a little behind Konnoto and his companion, down a brilliantly-lighted corridor, while Weland understood the look of disgust in Tommy's face when the pair in front of them turned partly round as the man gave their tickets to a commissionaire. The girl had a pretty round figure, but Weland had observant eyes, and noticed that the tight-fitting dress was well worn and the little gloves shabby. The hat was also, in spite of its evident cheapness, tastefully neat, and while the face beneath it was distinctly comely, it was free from effrontery and there was a look of weariness in it. This, however, vanished as the girl glanced up at her companion and smiled with large blue eyes. Then the two passed through the doorway in front of them, and Tommy turned to Weland.

"That wasn't at all what I expected to see," he said very suggestively.

Weland nodded, but his face was a trifle grim. "I suppose there are thousands of them on the verge of starvation," he answered. "I feel rather like kicking Konnoto. That girl's face has got hold of me. Absurd, of course, but I can't help a fancy that she's not accustomed to these places, and it's some time since she had enough to eat. All this seems out of keeping, doesn't it, with a tragedy?"

Tommy looked round with an air of languid reflection at the gaudy decorations, great glaring lamps and rows of faces smiling somewhat broadly just then.

"You have some curious notions, considering what your business is," he said.

It was a little later and the audience were shouting their appreciation of a topical song, when Konnoto approached the table where they were sitting. He sat down and smiled deprecatingly.

"It was not exactly on good terms that we parted, Lieutenant Ormond, but one makes allowances for anything that may be said in a moment of excitement," he observed. "You are enjoying yourselves—a night out, eh?"

"Half an hour of it is about enough for me," said Tommy dryly. "I needn't ask the same question."

Konnoto shook his head. "I fear you make a mistake to my detriment," he said. "I am here to observe the amusements of the British democracy."

Tommy looked at him curiously out of half-closed eyes. "What the devil has the British democracy to do with you?"

Konnoto stiffened suddenly. "I see the point of the question, and it is one that it may happen you will be sorry for," he said. "It is in effect what Naseby asked a few weeks ago. You are wrong, both of you. Is there a difference between your blood and mine?"

"Have a drink!" said Weland, with a little expressionless laugh. "You're talking nonsense, Konnoto. You will be a king in your own country, and he's—Lieutenant Tommy. Still, why can't you leave Englishwomen—who, I think, would sooner be without you—alone?"

Konnoto poured himself out a glass of wine, and then, though one could see the stage from the buffet where they sat, and the rest of the men in it were watching the contortions of an acrobat, stood up very straight.

"I am now a king," he said. "What my relations with the lady yonder are does not concern you, but I will drink once with you. You have got your foot upon the neck of the African. Will you always keep it there? You make your profit on the degradation of my country, and when we would show that we are willing to think you believe in federal unity, and the bonds of brotherhood your missionaries prate about, the lash of scorn is on our cheek. Well, one would hope you are prepared for what must come of it—and now to the black hand or the white one that is strong enough to hold Konnoto!"

The objections of those whose view he obstructed had in the meanwhile been growing louder, and now there was a clamour. "Can't see through you. Get down. Put the nigger out!"

A commissioner who quelled the disturbance drew Konnoto away, and Weland looked at Tommy.

"His father must have died. He has got a cable. I wonder if there was anything behind the rest of it."

"Then," said Tommy, dryly, "the fat will be in the fire. I'd have sailed with you to-morrow if I'd known this earlier. Anyway, another few weeks will see me started. There's going to be work for both of us by and by."

A PRINCE'S WIFE

THE manager of the big music-store leaned upon his desk, looking up with indecision in his face, for he was greatly tempted to take a risk.

"Is there nobody who would recommend you?" he said. "If it was only a note from your clergyman I might strain a point."

"No," said the girl who stood before him, in a voice that was almost hoarse, "I don't know any one. Still, even if you told somebody to watch me, couldn't you let me come for a month? You could turn me off if you didn't think I was to be trusted then."

"If the place was my own I think I would venture, but it isn't," he said. "I'm afraid I really couldn't engage you without references. If you could get one from anybody you could come back."

"Thank you," she said. "You are the only one who would even listen, but I was afraid it was no use when I came in."

It was ten minutes later when she entered a bustling shop, where although she had eaten nothing since morning she spent several shillings on cheap finery. She sighed as she took them from the little shabby purse, though it was evident to the girl who served her that

she had obtained the utmost value for the money. Then she went out with the parcels and glanced at the drizzle which was falling more thickly than ever.

"Two miles, and if I walk that shoe will certainly split," she said. "Well, I may be able to buy new ones to-morrow. I'll be reckless."

She caught a car that came clanging by, and a quarter of an hour later climbed the long stairway of a big tenement house with evident weariness. Then pushing a door open she entered a poorly-lighted room and dropped with a little sigh of content into the nearest chair. The room was sparsely furnished and a very little fire burned in the grate, but it was spotlessly neat, as was the dress of the girl who sat sewing under a naked gas jet. She was a plain girl, hard of features, lean and straight in shape, but she had grave kindly eyes, and there was sympathy in them as she glanced at her companion.

"Nothing again, Addy? You're tired and wet. I kept some tea for you," she said.

Addy laughed in a curious hard fashion. "They will not have me without references. It's no use, I've done with it. I'm not going to worry any one again."

The girl who was sewing flashed a swift glance at her, and then stooped over the fabric on her knee.

"Hadn't you better take the tea while it's hot?" she said quietly.

Addy lifted the little teapot with the chipped top from the hob and laid it beside a plate on which were placed four slices of very thinly-spread bread and butter. She ate two of them almost greedily and then laid the rest aside.

"That must be enough. I've just two shillings left, and you have nothing to spare," she said. "Anyway, I don't want any more, I'm going to have supper to-night."

Her companion noticed the ring in her voice and the hardness of her face when she took down a dress from a peg.

"What are you going to do, Addy?" she said.

"Put this trimming on. You will help me, Janet. I could never make it lie as flat as you can. The thing fits me rather well, and I must look smart to-night."

Janet looked up sharply. "Addy," she said, "what do you mean?"

"Only that I'm not going out to look for situations any more."

"Well?" said Janet, with strained intentness.

"I can't starve. They wouldn't take me into any home. I haven't done anything wrong—yet. I can't sew, I can't paint photographs, but I'm still pretty."

Janet rose suddenly with a flush in her plain face. "Addy," she said sharply, "you can't. Anything but that. I've had good work lately and you could do a part of it for me."

Addy smiled wearily and now her voice was curiously quiet. "I don't think I could, and you haven't half enough to eat yourself," she said. "I've done everything I could and it isn't the least use. Now, I'll never trouble you again, you'll help me with this dress?"

"No," said Janet, slowly, "I'll not lay a finger on it."

The pink colour showed for a moment in Addy's face; but it faded again and she quietly took up and shook out the dress.

"Then," she said, "I think I can manage it myself."

She fell to work sewing and, though time was precious to her, the girl with the plain face watched her while her own work lay undone on her knee.

"Addy," she said, "you mustn't. Wait—just a day or two—something must turn up."

Addy shook her head. "I can't," she said. "I promised I would meet him to-night; but I didn't mean to go if they would have taken me at the music-shop."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know. He comes from Africa and he's rich. I met him when I went to the Varieties one night with Tom and Lou. I told you about them and they're

married now, you know. He came and sat behind us, and it was to make the others laugh I let him talk to me. Then I met him in the Arcade next day, and he took his hat off instead of pretending not to see me. I'd been turned off from three or four shops that day and was feeling lonely. We went to the Criterion and I had tea there, like a lady. He asked me to go to the Varieties with him to-night. He had something special to tell me and I must come because he was going away."

She stopped with a little gesture of resignation that was intensely dramatic in its hopelessness, and then went on with her sewing almost unconcernedly. Janet, however, understood, and was stirred to deeper compassion, for she too was one of the beaten who have loosed their grip on hope.

"Nothing but that or slow starvation for such as us! It's all horribly wrong," she said.

Addy said nothing, but her fingers moved faster, and an hour had passed when she stood up and sloughed off the old serge dress. Next she took out a big, wide-brimmed hat her companion had trimmed for her, and then stood still before the little glass with a faint flush in her face, while Janet watched her with a very curious look in her big grey eyes.

Addy winced as she met her gaze.

"Don't look at me like that. Tell me will I do. It can't be helped!" she said.

She turned and looked back at her image over one shoulder, while the pose displayed the contour of the little rounded figure and the line of the firm white neck. The face was partly in shadow under the wide-brimmed hat, but save for the red spot in the cheek, it was too pale in its colouring just then, and there was an unpleasant hardness in it. It, however, softened suddenly as she turned with a little swift movement and kissed her companion.

"You will keep the old serge, Janet. It's shabby, but it's warm, and there are two shillings in the purse.

"I shan't want them any more," she said. "You have been very good to me, and I'm never coming back."

Janet kissed her almost roughly, then thrust her away, and Addy, gathering a fold of the trailing skirt in one hand, passed out of the room. When the door closed behind her Janet flung down her sewing, and drawing her chair nearer the fire sat staring into it with misty eyes. Then with a little resolute movement of her shoulders, she shook off the thoughts that crowded upon her and fell to work again.

It grew slowly colder, for the fire burned down until only a pale red blink showed in the blackened grate, but the girl toiled on, for she was sensible of a great loneliness and there was much to be done. At last when a big clock tolled out the hour across the dripping roofs she stood up, shivering, and then listened with a curious throbbing of her heart when the clangour died away. Somebody with a light foot was certainly coming up the stairway. Then the door swung open and Addy, flushed in face, came in.

"I've come back for just a little," she said. "Oh, throw that work away! This is for you. It's part of what he gave me to buy my trousseau with."

She flung a few golden coins ringing on the table and laughed shrilly when Janet drew back.

"Oh, you needn't be afraid of touching them. I'm to be married before we go out," she said, and leaned back in her chair shaking with harsh, meaningless laughter.

"You're going to be married?" said Janet, who did not appear to be sensible of the grim irony behind her astonishment.

"Yes," said Addy, closing one hand tight. "Didn't I tell you so. At the Registrar's, the day after tomorrow. They taught us at the shop to ask the long price first—one can always come down afterwards, you know. Oh, he was straight enough. He had meant to take a white woman back with him, he said, and he'd

never seen one half as nice as I was. I'm to have every thing I can wish for. This is in the meanwhile. I don't know how much there is in it, but look here."

She pulled out a little wallet, an elegant affair with gold initials upon the back of it, and Janet's big eyes opened further.

"Then," she said slowly, "he isn't an Englishman?"

Addy laughed again though her fingers trembled and her lips quivered. "No, he isn't, but I shall get accustomed to him. He's kind, and he really isn't very black."

"Lord!" said Janet. "A nigger. And he'll have a lot more wives out there already."

"If he has I'll turn them out," and once more the curious hard look crept into Addy's face. "There'll be only one prince's wife in Konnoto country, and it can't be worse than this one."

It was afternoon next day when Konnoto, immaculately dressed, climbed a dingy stairway in an office building in an east coast seaport town. He went to the top floor and opened a door on which a brass plate bore the names "Wyckoff and Voerman." A big man, with the pale blue eyes and tow-coloured hair usually seen on the shores of the Baltic, rose when he came in and laid a box of cigars upon the table.

"You are the gentleman on whose behalf Schreider made the appointment, I presume?" he said, pointing to a chair.

Konnoto nodded. "I was recommended to you by Schreider," he said. "He vouched for your discretion, which might be essential, and your trustworthiness. Now, we will surmise that a friend of mind in Africa desired to purchase rifles."

"He would, under the present international arrangements, be running a considerable risk."

"That is understood," he said. "The question is whether you could supply a stand of five hundred English Martinis, and at what price?"

“New, of special make, at approximately four pounds, discarded service rifles down to forty shillings. Casing extra. Delivered London or Liverpool, and they could, if advisable, be labelled in English, French or Arabic hardware or agricultural tools. A few African matchets could be packed in each case next the cover and charged for at market price.”

Konnoto smiled a little. “Cases of that kind could scarcely be sent down for conveyance by the regular boats from Liverpool. I presume you know that one could get a few shillings off the prices mentioned by buying through a Birmingham broker.”

Voerman met his gaze and there was the faintest gleam of comprehension in his eyes.

“Then,” he said, “it is evident that you wish for something more. The rifles are not for the Zanzibar littoral or Morocco.”

Konnoto appeared a trifle astonished. “You seem to be sure?”

“I am. It is necessary to make quick surmises when handling affairs of the kind, and I am, I may inform you, tolerably acquainted with Africa. You have been sitting for two minutes now in a good light, my friend. Those rifles would require to be delivered between Dakar and the German Cameroons.”

Konnoto laid his finger on a map he took out. “They would be delivered here. There is a creek easy of access with eighteen feet of water in it, and leading marks could be supplied a steamboat captain. The mail boats pass well to the south and west of it, and it is very rarely a gunboat appears on that coast. A tramp going south by The Cape could slip in and out without the loss of more than four days.”

“Then,” said Voerman, “I fancy we could undertake to land the rifles there for the sum of six hundred pounds. The cost to be paid when they go on board by British bankers, with half the freight, the remaining three hundred to be handed the captain on delivery. As the cost

of conveyance would remain the same, it might be advisable to take a thousand."

Konnoto rose. "It is not decided yet whether any will be necessary. If they are you will be communicated with. The difficulty is that the man ordering them would to a considerable extent place himself in your hands."

"Precisely!" said Voerman. "It would be necessary for him to take us on trust. I can only point out that if we betrayed a customer or two it would ruin our business."

Konnoto went out and made his way to the station, while an hour later a man he had met in London got into the carriage.

"So you haven't gone home to Africa yet. Tommy Ormond told me that you probably would," he said.

"I expect to sail with my wife next week."

VI

MRS. KONNOTO ASSERTS HERSELF

It was about half-past six in the evening, but the lamp in Major Halifax's room was lighted, for darkness had already closed down upon the sun-scorched West African town. The room was almost insupportably hot, though it reeked with damp, and a little steamy air played in and out through the closed green lattices.

The lamp was shaded, and three men sat just within its light about a little table whereon, as usual in that country, there stood several bottles of different shapes and a bowl of melting ice. Major Halifax sat upright, a broad-shouldered, bull-necked man, with a big, bronzed face and grey in his hair, who had, so he boasted, been seasoned against fever in the jungles of India. Opposite him sat Commissioner Langley, and he was thin and spare, with a face of waxy pallor and a single glass screwed into his eye. He was dressed in a claret-

coloured dinner-jacket and the whitest of linen and duck. Trader Weland, also attired in spotless duck, lay in a cane chair, and there was a little dry smile in his eyes as he glanced at the Commissioner.

"It's distinctly good of you to come down so far to warn us," said the latter. "Always glad to see you, anyway, and it will give me pleasure to lay your views before the headman when—ah—he's better. Has to be kept quiet and free from worry in the meanwhile, don't you know. You—ah—really think there's trouble brewing among the niggers?"

"Yes," said Weland, dryly. "I really do. Still, as a matter of fact, I came down to see the steamboat agent. The last lot of gum I sent home was delivered in bad condition."

"Just so!" said Langley. "Hope you made him pay. But about those bushmen. What is it exactly they're kicking at?"

"The hut tax, or, to be more correct, the way it's collected by the headmen you farm it out to, and the augmented gin duty. That's the ostensible grievance, but exactly what is working in the bushman's mind is more than any white man knows. There is something, I'm quite sure. They're too quiet, and the singing men have been going round again."

"That's bad," said Langley. "Condemnably bad. I suppose even you don't know what they sing about? Those rascally headmen will no doubt be—ah—making their fortune out of the tax, but we can't go round and collect it, and we must have a revenue."

Halifax shook his head. "It was a devilish foolish thing to try to raise it on the nigger's gin," he said. "Wouldn't like to pay any more for my own liquor. It's too dear as it is. Made myself ill not long ago by experimenting with cheap sherry." The bull-necked soldier laughed. "But I'm not going to worry. If the niggers want to come out, let them come. Then we'll smash them. The battalion's fit for anything."

Langley smiled at Weland. "Our friend never does worry. He would rather like us to send the troops up. It's easy, and—ah—expensive when they don't come back, but you and the niggers pay the bill. Seriously, what is your notion? We can't take those taxes off."

"I fancy Konnoto is your best card—if you can manage him. Kwaka couldn't turn out without him, and he means to civilize his country. I met him in England. It will pay you to be civil to him. Keep the difference of colour out of sight and meet him as a white man. Let him feel you regard him as a nigger and Kwaka will get him."

Langley nodded. "Shouldn't wonder if you're right," he said. "Do what I can, but can't answer for the others. The Major doesn't like niggers. Konnoto's coming to-night."

Halifax rose with a little yawn. "Langley's doing! Mean to be civil—always am in my own house, but I've seen the folly of the man-and-brother business in India. Langley wanted me to make it full dress. Wouldn't do it for any nigger at this temperature. Now I fancy Mrs. Halifax is waiting for you."

They went out and the Major smiled good-humouredly when Weland sat down beside a little, white-faced lady who lay in a big cane chair in the next room. The spareness of her frame was emphasized by the badly-made dress of straw-coloured Indian silk, and the sun of the tropics had long ago melted all comeliness out of her, but she had clear brown eyes and a manner which could still bring most of the men on the station to her feet.

"You have done no good?" she said with a little smile.

"No," said Weland. "Still, I never expected to."

"Jack, in fact, would prefer a fight?"

"I fancy he will get it," said Weland, grimly.

The little lady's face, which was a trifle haggard, grew suddenly grave. "You can do nothing to stop it? It was a trifle horrible last time."

"Very little. Still, I fancy, you are in a more fortunate position, and I hope you will make the most of it. A good deal depends upon Konnoto, and I wonder if you would very much mind trying your hand upon him with a little delicate flattery. To be candid, an outbreak wouldn't suit me just now. I expect a good year at the factory."

Mrs. Halifax laughed. "I scarcely think it is necessary to explain your motives to me. Well, though Jack does not like niggers, I will see what can be done with Konnoto, but it is going to be difficult. You see he has a wife with him—an Englishwoman!"

Weland stared at her in astonishment. "You have met her?"

"No, they only arrived to-day. She will be here presently, but there is another surprise in store for you. I have a companion and I'm half afraid you will make me jealous."

The frankness of Weland's laugh and the little twinkle in the lady's eyes were significant.

"My allegiance cannot be shaken, madam," said the man. "It was offered to the kindest and cleverest woman in Africa long ago. Besides, there is another reason. There is a barrier between any girl you would make a companion of and Weland the trader."

"Well, we shall see. Haven't you surmounted the barrier already?"

"No," said the man dryly. "You and your husband have held out your hands to me across it, but I think you have only done so because I showed you that I remembered the barrier was there. That is where I am wiser than Konnoto. He can't realize it. Well, you are right on one point. His wife is going to be the difficulty. Still, couldn't you stretch a point and be—yourself—to her?"

Mrs. Halifax did not answer for a moment and looked straight in front of her thoughtfully.

"Of course, I realize the importance of it," she said.

"Still, one has one's notions of what is fitting, but it's a difficult subject. I will wait until I have seen her. What brought you back here? You were going to Burma!"

"It didn't seem quite advisable that Kwaka should have it all his own way," he said with a little laugh. "You have heard of the soothsayer's prediction and the Sapolto Ju-Ju?"

Mrs. Halifax laid her hand, which was thin and slightly yellow, upon his arm. "It was no doubt the same reason which impelled you to plead for Konnoto's wife," she said. "I think the barrier you spoke of only exists in your fancy, Derrick Weland."

Then there was a rattle at the door, and Weland, who was distinctly conscious of the hand upon his arm, sat still. This was not altogether easy, but he had an implicit confidence in Mrs. Halifax's discretion.

"It is only my companion," she said.

Then the door opened and Weland started when a girl, who stopped somewhat abruptly, stood in the doorway. She was tall and very comely, with dark eyes, and clusters of dark hair coiled in a great knot upon a shapely head, while the trailing white dress wonderfully became her.

"This is Derrick Weland, Millicent, one of my most devoted servants," said the lady. "I will leave you to talk to him. Miss Gaskell, Derrick."

Weland made the girl a little inclination and then drew forward a chair when Mrs. Halifax left them. Millicent, however, made a slightly impatient gesture.

"The rooms are almost insufferably hot. I was going out for a little air," she said.

Weland held the door open, and they passed out into the verandah.

Millicent sat down in a canvas chair and Weland leaned against a pillar, looking at her.

"Beautiful, isn't it?" he said, pointing vaguely to sea and town and bush. "I wonder if one might ask what brought you here?"

Millicent laughed softly. "Perhaps much the same thing that took you back."

"I presume that nothing I could say would induce you to go home by the next steamer?"

"No," said Millicent, "why should it? Of course, I have heard about the fever, but there are several Englishwomen here whom it does not seem to trouble, as well as your friend Mrs. Halifax."

"Who is devoted to her husband, and you have not that excuse," he said. "Still, since you are not going back, I will admit that everybody does not take fever, and I think no other country has the same uncanny fascination as this one. It's beautiful and deadly, alluring in its mystery, splendid in its barbarism, and grotesque in its tragedy, but it demands single-hearted service from the white man."

"Still, there are, one concludes, many white men who fail to render it," she said. "This is held up as the land of self-indulgence."

Weland smiled dryly and glanced down at the smear of silver light that lay upon a row of little black crosses.

"Well," he said, "the penalty is exacted from them. Now, of course, it may appear presumption, considering that you are in Mrs. Halifax's hands, but this is a curious country—I know it tolerably well—and you may go up with her inland. You may want advice, or there might be some trifling service I could render—and I think I am your kinsman, Tommy's, closest friend."

"Well," she said, "I may, if it appears very necessary, ask your opinion. I suppose you know Prince Konnoto—and his wife—will be here to-night?"

Weland still regarded her steadily. "I scarcely think the woman who would marry Konnoto would be one you would care to make a friend of, and one cannot afford to ignore the prejudices of one's countrymen in Africa. I am making the suggestion against my interest."

"Doesn't it sound just a little unchivalrous? No doubt she will feel very lonely."

"Of course!" said Weland. "I realized that it did before I mentioned it."

Millicent looked at him curiously, but just then a gong sent its sonorous clangour through the wooden building, and Weland, who opened the door, stood with it in his hand. Twenty minutes later he was standing amidst a group of officers and officials and their wives in the sparsely-furnished living room, when Konnoto came in smiling with a girl upon his arm. She was delicately pretty in a curious, dollish fashion, and there was a many-coloured gleam of jewels about her plump white arms and neck, while no one could have taken exception to her taste in attire. Yet Weland felt the distinction between her and Mrs. Halifax, climate-worn and dowdy in her ill-made dress, and the girl with the dark eyes and hair who stood quietly at her side. Then while he noticed the hard set of her mouth, and the look, half-appealing, half-defiant, in her pale blue eyes, recollection flashed upon him, and he recognized the girl he had seen with Konnoto at the Varieties.

There was a general presentation, and when the new arrivals sat down Langley glanced at Weland interrogatively.

"Well?" he said.

Weland nodded. "I'm sorry for her!" he said.

"Yes," said the Commissioner, dryly. "I think you're warranted. The women will never tolerate her. Wonder where Konnoto got her? There's Mrs. Halifax trying to be civil."

"Oh, I'm not in the least put out," said a voice which, while not unpleasant in itself, had yet in it something that was not in those of the rest. "You see, I really didn't want to go to the Government House. We're quiet people, Konnoto and me, and after the hotels in the Canaries I feel this nice and homely."

"It might have been put more happily. Konnoto should—ah—warn her not to talk," said Langley, sardonically.

Captain Padget's wife next addressed the stranger, while Konnoto, the only man there in conventional evening dress, sat smiling, but evidently horribly ill at ease.

"How do I like Africa?" and the girl's voice, which was a trifle shrill, had now a tone of contempt in it. "I don't think much of it. It's so nasty and hot, and the black people stare at one so horribly. Of course, my husband's a little black too, but he was brought up in England, and he's a king, you know. He really isn't the least like a nigger in his habits. You couldn't expect it."

Weland could not quite check a smile when he saw Konnoto's face, which was very eloquent just then, and fancied that everybody was relieved when the clangour of the gong rolled through the building again. Then Major Halifax, smiling bravely, offered his arm to the princess, and the rest followed them into the dining-room. Mrs. Konnoto was excited and had unwisely determined to make an impression, though it was apparent that the profusion of silver, borrowed from the mess, augmented her difficulties in deciding how to attack each unusual dish. She discoursed between whiles volubly, but once she stopped abruptly when there was an outbreak of irrepressible laughter.

"She'll be the death of me!" groaned Captain Padget in Weland's ear, and then grew red in face as he saw that the lady was gazing at him steadily.

"Will you tell me what made you laugh?" she said.

"I really couldn't help it, madam," said the man.

"Nobody minds what I do. Please go on."

"I'm afraid you've forgotten your manners, sir. What I was telling them was not in the least funny," she said.

"It's a reprehensible shortcoming of his, madam," said the Major, dryly. "We have frequently noticed it, but as we haven't your courage we have had to put up with it."

"Then I suppose we must excuse him as he knows no better. Major Halifax, you really keep excellent wine. Though I don't know what it is, I like the kind I'm drinking now especially. I suppose it costs a good deal. It was champagne you used to give me at the Varieties, wasn't it, Konnoto?"

Konnoto talked to Mrs. Padget, who sat at his side, assiduously, but that lady, with malice in her heart, disregarded his evident wishes.

"I fancy your wife is addressing you," she said.

"I am," said the girl. "He hears well enough. I was telling them that we had champagne at the Varieties. Konnoto never grudged anything that would please me. We went there now and then, they had generally a good turn, but you will not know what that is. I suppose none of you have ever been to a music-hall?"

"I'm afraid we have," said Langley, looking at her very gravely through his eyeglass.

"Why should you be afraid? I'm sure you'd see prettier girls there than any I met in the Canaries and the few I've seen in Africa."

Then Millicent, who sat next to Weland, touched his arm. "Talk," she said. "Talk about anything! Can't you see that Mrs. Halifax wishes it?"

Weland did what he could, and the hum of voices grew louder, while Mrs. Konnoto, noticing that the observations she launched forth secured little attention, went on with her dinner, to everybody's relief.

The next hour was somewhat of an ordeal to most of those who gathered in the hot drawing-room, but it was nobody's fault that at last a gleam of comprehension seemed to dawn upon Mrs. Konnoto, and she sat very quiet with a little flush growing deeper in her face. Then when Mrs. Padget answered an indiscreet question coldly, she rose, and, for the long lattice was open and one or two of the rest had gone out, slipped out into the verandah, where, as it happened, Millicent was standing with Weland. The man was in the shadow, and Mrs.

Konnoto, who did not see him, leaned upon the balustrade with her shoulders shaking, until Millicent, who stepped forward, touched her.

"Come and sit by me," she said. "Go away, Mr. Weland!"

Weland swung round, but he caught a glimpse of the girl's wet face in the moonlight, and felt his heart throb curiously as he saw Millicent slip an arm round her waist.

"It's all new, isn't it?" she said. "Still, you will soon get accustomed to Africa. Nobody meant to be unkind."

The girl shook her arm off and stood very straight in the moonlight, a little pathetic figure, with one plump hand clenched.

"You have a kind face and I could like you, but I hate the rest," she said. "They only came to laugh at me, and some of them were soldiers! Tell my husband I want him. I'm going away."

Millicent failed to persuade her, and five minutes later Mrs. Halifax's guests received a painful astonishment when the Princess of Konnoto walked slowly into the room and then stood still a moment with her hand upon her husband's arm. Little, flushed, and wet-cheeked as she was, she was not without a curious dignity just then, and the gesture she made became her, when Mrs. Halifax, rising, held out her hand.

"I have made a mistake to-night. I should never have come, but I thought out here in Africa you might be friendly. It wouldn't have cost you anything," she said. "Still, I would like you to remember that it doesn't affect my husband whatever I am. He can afford to be kind to me, because he is a king."

They went out together, with Major Halifax, whose face was redder than usual, behind them. He touched Konnoto's shoulder at the gate.

"I'm sorry this has happened. Is there anything I can do?" he said.

Konnoto looked at him quietly. "I don't think

there is. I also fancy it is not my wife who has made the mistake."

Then he turned abruptly, and went down the steep pathway with his wife at his side.

In the meanwhile Mrs. Halifax, feeling slightly ruffled in temper, which was, perhaps, not altogether astonishing, went out into the verandah to recover her tranquillity, and came upon Millicent and Weland there. She smiled at the man somewhat acidly.

"I am willing to admit that Mrs. Konnoto was right, but there is one thing I don't quite understand, Mr. Weland," she said. "Since you urged me to make much of the lady, why did you suggest that Millicent should have nothing to do with her? You must not, however, blame Millicent for telling me. It came out accidentally."

Mrs. Halifax drew her companion away, and ten minutes later Weland walked down the hill with Langley, who smiled as he glanced at him.

"I was passing outside the verandah and surmised that you had been putting your foot in it," he said.

"I'm afraid I did," said Weland. "Still, not more than the rest of you. Mrs. Konnoto's remark was significant. She said a little kindness would have cost you nothing."

"Well?" said Langley.

"I fancy the fact that she didn't get it will cost the colony a good deal. Unless I am mistaken to-night will have results."

VII

THE HEAD OF THE STATION

THE morning was very hot and the yellow river that flowed past the stockaded compound flamed dazzlingly when Weland and his book-keeper sat on the verandah

of the Sapolto factory. The whitewashed salt and gin sheds beneath them flung back an intolerable glare, and the iron roof overhead was too hot to touch, but a cluster of woolly-haired Kroo boys were trotting unconcernedly across the scorching strip of sand between sheds and river. Two big dug-out canoes already deeply loaded lay alongside the bank, and across the river a great forest of cottonwoods and palms rolled away as far as the eye could follow. No sun ray penetrated its dim recesses, for it was a land of eternal shadow, inhabited by malevolent spirits, so the almost naked bushmen who crept through it fearfully, flintlock gun in hand, believed. Beyond it King Kwaka's stronghold lay amidst quaking swamps, with the drier country of Prince Konnoto on its confines.

The factory stood high on piles and so escaped, in part at least, the insidious miasma that strikes the white man down, but it spite of the heat it trickled with damp, and from the open door of the living-room a sour smell of mildew drifted out into the verandah. Two white men lived there, though when trade was brisk there was work for four, but a row of crosses stood on the glaring strip of sand across the river, and Weland had told his employers to send him no more of the young lads who come out as trading clerks to Western Africa. They generally died as soon as he had taught them to be useful.

He was dressed neatly in white duck, with the jacket buttoned to his throat, but Blower, the book-keeper, wore his open, so that one could see the thin greasy singlet beneath it stained with palm-oil. He was a little, spare man with thin hair, twinkling ferrety eyes and a suggestion of indulgence in his pallid face, of a type not unusual in African factories. Opposite him, across the little table, the Rev. Hammond Joynson, also dressed in white duck, lay in a canvas chair, and he was little and portly, with a face that was unusually fleshy for that country, and, for he had laid aside his

big helmet, scanty wisps of lank, pale-coloured hair. His appearance suggested good humour and no great intelligence, while nobody would have suspected him of being an ascetic. He sighed as he set down the glass of Madeira Weland had supplied him with.

"I am much afraid that my journey into Kwaka's country has been fruitless," he said. "The people seemed less disposed to listen than usual, and they supplied us very indifferently with provisions which, I fancy, they could not eat themselves. In fact, there was a suggestion of hostility in their attitude, and I considered it advisable to leave one village expeditiously."

Weland appeared thoughtful, but Blower grinned. "I warned you not to go up there at all," he said. "Kwaka never was very fond of missionaries, and there's nothing that's much use to him to be got out of you just now. Still, if I'd been him I'd have sent you a few converts, just to throw dust into the Government fellows' eyes."

Joynson shook his head. "I am almost afraid it is a manœuvre he has practised before," he said. "The last he sent disappeared one night, and next morning we found very little in our store shed. One would wish to be charitable, but it certainly was a significant coincidence. I am, I may admit, accustomed to similar disappointments, but Brother Leslie, who had laboured with them faithfully, took it to heart."

"How do you get on with Ormond?" said Weland.

Joynson appeared to reflect. "Our intercourse is, I think, profitable, and, for the most part, pleasant, but we have occasional differences of opinion."

Joynson appeared a trifle uncomfortable, and Weland broke in, "We had expected you would have been appointed head of the station."

"I may admit that I was a trifle hurt when the Society placed a younger man above my head," and Joynson sighed resignedly. "Still, I cannot question Brother Leslie's abilities. In fact, it is his austerity alone I take

exception to. Now, I am not by any means an ascetic. One must consider the body in this country, and this is really most excellent Madeira."

Weland laughed as he filled the missionary's glass again. "I'm glad to see it appreciated," he said. "Has it occurred to you that you have an exceptional opportunity just now in Konnoto's country?"

"It has, and we lately sent two coloured teachers up. Konnoto received them cordially, and on his journey up river spent a day with us, but—you will understand I am speaking in confidence—there was a suggestion of cynical bitterness in his conversation, and I am a trifle dubious about the sincerity of his good-will."

"So am I," said Weland, with a little dry smile.

Joynson rose with evident reluctance. "It is time I was pushing on, but, while one feels diffident about asking it, there is a little favour you could do us," he said. "Mrs. Halifax and her companion have been staying at the Mission for the past few weeks—I believe she was recommended a change from the coast—but she went down to Shulimah when she heard the Major was there, and left Miss Gaskell with my wife, who has taken a fancy to her. Her company seemed to have an inspiring effect on Brother Leslie too."

Weland glanced at him sharply, while Blower grinned. "Do you mean anything especial by that?" he said.

"No," said Joynson, hastily, "only what I said. Leslie has, in fact, somewhat absurd notions on the subject of celibacy. Well, we had word yesterday that the Government steamer is going down river from Shulimah on Wednesday, and we wondered whether you could take Miss Gaskell that far in the launch. Mrs. Joynson would, of course, go with her."

"I will be there early on the Tuesday morning, and we should get down to Shulimah before it's dark," said Weland.

Joynson went down the stairway with Blower, who surreptitiously slipped a bottle of Madeira into the ham-

mock the woolly-haired bearers brought up. Then as they swung away under their burden, which was no light one, into the shadowy bush the book-keeper laughed.

"He'll find it by and by, and I don't quite think he'll throw it away," he said. "The Rev. Hammond has a good deal of sense and it's precious little comfort of that kind he'll get while Brother Leslie's at Opponotax. Well, I'd better repack that cylinder gland since you'll want the launch."

Weland had not reached the Mission when Millicent awakened on the Tuesday morning. It had been a heavy, oppressive night, with no breath of air stirring to mitigate the almost insupportable temperature, and the sour steam from the river had wrapped its woolly folds about the lonely building.

As she stood at the verandah the forest lay about her, impressive in its silence and unchangingness, an abode of fear and cruelty where progress stopped short and prolific Nature pulled down and absorbed the white man's handiwork. The girl felt its influence, and it was with a faint thrill she glanced up at the cross which grew into shape above the little palm-thatched church, and wondered at the daring of the men who had placed that symbol there. Then she shivered as she looked at the crosses below it beside the river.

It was, perhaps, the river which drew her, for she moved towards the clustered crosses and stopped amidst the heavy-scented blossoms that grew thickest there while the dawn flushed the eastern sky. They sprang from corruption into stainless beauty, great waxlike lilies that open in the night, and remembering that she had seen them in the church she gathered two handfuls and turned towards the building, with a vague recognition of their significance. The door, by Leslie Ormond's wishes, stood always open, and, for day comes swiftly in that region, a dim light crept in through the narrow windows as she went softly up the aisle. Then she stopped abruptly, for a man was kneeling in the chancel.

The light, however, was growing brighter, and while she waited, almost afraid to move, the figure in the stained, eastern window, which was all the adornment the place possessed, grew into brilliancy, and a broad crimson smear fell on the man's bent head. It widened, showing how his thin white garments clung soaked with damp about his attenuated frame, for the mists from the river had crept into the building. Then as a long shaft of brightness streamed in he rose very stiffly and saw the girl.

She stood still with the growing radiance upon her, immaculately white in her long trailing dress, with the stainless blossoms in her hands, and the man stared at her as though he fancied she had materialized out of the surrounding gloom.

"I could not sleep and the flowers attracted me," she said. "I thought I would gather a few for the altar. You generally have some there."

"You came so softly that I did not hear you," he said. "As it happened you had been in my thoughts, and when I saw you I almost believed you were a vision. This country breeds fancies—for the most part terrible ones."

Millicent laughed a little, because she felt that it was advisable. "I assure you that I am very material," she said. "Will you take the flowers from me?"

"No," said the man very gravely, "you must make your own offering. They would, I think, be more acceptable from you."

He stood watching her with a curious strained expression in his eyes and his lips hard set as she moved about the altar, and then when she came back to him touched her shoulder.

"Come," he said simply, "the damp is heavy here. We will go out into the sun."

"You have been in the church all night?" she said.

Ormond smiled, though his face was drawn and grey. "Yes," he said. "Joynson will be indignant when he

hears of it, and his wife will lecture me, but I think the discipline is good for me."

"But isn't there a risk of fever?" said Millicent, who was not unwilling to probe her companion's thoughts.

"It is not unlikely. Everybody in this country, however, takes fever sooner or later. I have had it several times."

"Were you wise in leaving England? You would have shaken off the malaria there," she said.

Ormond smiled a little. "I am, at least, afraid my reason for doing so would not commend themselves to most people. When I was told that I would die if I stayed in Africa I went home with hazy aspirations, and found they could not be realized. One must, it seemed, dissimulate and work only in the conventional groove, defer to prejudices, and avoid suspicion. I could not fight with my hands tied, and when I shook off the trammels all who could have helped me turned against me. One can do so little alone."

"Still, is it otherwise in Africa? The man who will not be content with the accepted point of view must meet with difficulties everywhere, and even Nature is against him here."

"At least the fight is open and one is not betrayed by one's allies."

"But," said Millicent, "It must be very long."

"That," said Ormond, quietly, "is not our business. The daily work is our one concern, and it is sufficiently arduous. Other men have toiled and fallen here already and I do not think any of them was sorry when the summons came."

"And yet they must have done so little. Isn't the sacrifice of life a trifle horrible?"

Ormond gravely shook his head. "It seems so, but I think it is necessary," he said. "Even the traders do not complain, and every puncheon of oil they send home is bought with blood. That, however, has nothing to do with you. You are not called upon to take part in our

struggle, and I am almost glad you are going down river to-day."

"I scarcely think one would consider that complimentary," said Millicent, with a soft laugh.

Ormond made a little deprecatory gesture. "This place is too sad for you, and I think you were meant for happiness. Take all that is innocently offered you. You have done more than a little when you brought us a passing gleam of brightness."

"And yet you wish to send me away?"

Ormond's face grew almost grim again, and he gazed past the girl at the forest.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I do."

Then the Rev. Hammond Joynson appeared in the door of the store-shed in somewhat ludicrous disarray, for he was short and portly, and Millicent, turning, flitted up the stairway.

VIII

DOWN RIVER

THE green lattices were closed, and only a dim light crept into the bare room of the Opponotax mission, where Mrs. Joynson lay shivering in spite of the unpleasantly-elevated temperature. She was a little, frail, washed-out woman, with the thin hair and yellow pallor which result from frequent attacks of African fever, and her head ached almost intolerably that morning.

"It is especially unfortunate that I can't get up, because my husband must keep his appointment with the native headman," she said. "I had counted on going down with you to Shulimah."

Millicent, who sat on the edge of the bed dressed for a journey, smiled at her. "I am very sorry to leave you with the fever on you, but I don't think you should worry about me," she said.

"You have a good courage. I have once or twice wondered why with your attainments and appearance you ever came out to Africa."

"I'm afraid those somewhat doubtful advantages had a good deal to do with it," she said. "I was also, as my prosperous relatives, who gave me all the chances they could, considered, unnecessarily fastidious. They made me feel, without perhaps intending it, that I was a failure. Mrs. Halifax is, however, very kind to me, and I am not sorry I came out here."

Millicent kissed her as the roar of escaping steam rose from the river. "Mr. Weland will be getting impatient, and I shall be glad to come back when I may."

She went out, the vibrating roar of steam died away, and five minutes later Joynson came into the darkened room.

"I like that girl, and yet I feel almost glad she has gone," he said.

"Why?"

Joynson appeared to reflect for a moment or two. "I don't know that I am an especially observant man, but I notice things when they metaphorically hit me in the eye. Leslie has been unpleasantly restless lately—I presume there is a cause for it?"

"I shouldn't wonder!" said Mrs. Joynson, with a little smile. "Is there any reason why Leslie Ormond shouldn't marry like other men and go back to England and make a name for himself? It would not be difficult to him."

"Still," said Joynson, reflectively, "I don't think he will, and, since you ask me, I think there is a reason. Leslie has, of course, extreme notions on the marriage question, but I have fancied now and then that there was something else. One does not wear the hair shirt for nothing."

In the meanwhile, Weland's launch had swung out from the bank with every strip of metal flashing and the white deck gleaming in the sun. A woolly-haired Kroo

boy, ill at ease in the duck jacket and trousers he was not accustomed to, was stirring the little furnace, and Weland sat at the tiller astern with Millicent in front of him under the awning. She made a very dainty picture in her thin white dress and big white hat, but she was looking back across the flaming water watching the little thatched church and white mission-house fade among the palms.

"It is a beautiful country!" she said.

Weland smiled a little. "On the outside," he said. "It isn't wise to endeavour to find out what lies underneath."

"You know? You have been here eight years."

"Rather more than is pleasant! That is why I am somewhat anxious to get out of it."

"And you are going soon?"

Weland appeared reflective. "I think as soon as the trouble's over."

"Then you still expect trouble?"

Weland nodded. "I certainly do," he said. "It has been brewing for two years, though when I tell them so your friends down river will not believe me. I would like you to stay there and not come up here again."

"Why should you concern yourself about me?"

Weland laughed. "I can't think of any reason that would appear to warrant it, and yet I wouldn't like you to meet with any unpleasantness in the country between Shulimah and Sapolto. You see, I feel myself responsible for its good behaviour, and it now and then behaves most indecently."

"I think," said Millicent, slowly, "I realize your point of view, but you are not a Government officer."

Weland made no answer, and both felt that a good deal had been left unsaid, while it was an hour later when the Kroo boy, who was now lying apparently oblivious of the heat in the sun-glare forward, suddenly raised his head, and Weland saw a black object that swung with the current in the mouth of a sluggish creek.

"Hadn't you better move a little, Miss Gaskell? The sun is on you," he said.

Millicent glanced at him inquiringly, for there was a trace of sharpness in his voice, and he pulled the tiller over suddenly. The launch swerved a little, and Weland, leaning forward, clutched at the girl's shoulder as she glanced down at the river. She caught a passing glimpse of a rigid black shape, and looked up with a little gasp, grey in face.

"Oh," she said, "it's horrible!"

The Kroo boy laughed softly. "Dam bushman. King Kwaka he go make Ju-Ju. He done cut him 'troat.'"

The object was well astern now, rocking slowly on the frothy wake, but Millicent was shivering still.

"Make Ju-Ju?" she said, with a little quiver in her voice.

Weland nodded. "A slave or a malefactor offered to the Ju-Ju," he said. "It's one of the ways of the country and significant just now. Still, I meant to spare you this."

Millicent smiled somewhat feebly. "I brought it upon myself," she said.

Weland said nothing, and the girl was grateful. She remembered the sight she had seen with unpleasant distinctness and felt scarcely equal to further conversation. Nor did she care to glance at the river, and leaning back amidst the cushions watched the tufted palms and great, smooth-trunked cottonwoods slide past in long procession until at last she grew drowsy. Weland had laid out a little table with canned dainties when she looked round again.

"The glaring light is apt to give one a headache," he said. "I think you were wise to close your eyes."

Millicent smiled a little, for she was observant, and noticed how the sun had changed its position.

"Have we altered our direction very much?" she said.

"No," said Weland, incautiously. "The river is tolerably straight, but I don't quite understand the question."

He stopped abruptly and Millicent laughed. "I think you do," she said. "Was it very unbefitting for me to fall asleep, and do you always lunch in this fashion at Sapolto? We don't often see such dainties on the coast."

"African kings," said Weland, "have cultivated tastes, though I really think it's the decorated cans that please them."

Millicent contrived to make an excellent lunch, and afterwards lay still amidst the cushions while Weland talked. He talked, as she admitted, exceedingly well, and she laughed at the quaint stories of his life in the wild bush, though now and then she suspected that some of them had their gruesome side. The man was singularly free from ostentation, and she noticed how tactfully he avoided anything that suggested undue familiarity. In the meanwhile, with engines clanking, the launch swept on down the dazzling yellow stream, and the shadows were creeping across it when at last a cluster of huts grew into visibility in a little gap in the forest.

"Shulimah!" said Weland. "I am almost sorry we have got there."

"Still," she said, "I don't see the steamer."

"The steamer may be below the bend. We'll see her in a few minutes," he said.

Five minutes later they had run alongside the landing, but there was no sign of the steamer, and Weland sprang ashore. He vanished among the huts and was gone some time, while Millicent became sensible of a faint dismay. The huts beneath the forest were already growing blurred in outline, and night, she knew, comes suddenly in that region. Then Weland came back with a folded strip of paper in his hand.

"It is evidently from Mrs. Halifax. Do you mind reading it at once?" he said.

Millicent opened the paper, and it cost her an effort to

hide her consternation as she glanced at the message.

" 'Very sorry, but Jack found it necessary to go down river,' " she read. " 'I am afraid you will have to go back with Mr. Joynson to Opponotax and wait there until we can send the launch up.' "

Then she sat still for almost a minute until she became sensible that Weland was regarding her sympathetically.

"What shall I do?" she said, handing him the message.

"The niggers must have cleared out after Mrs. Halifax had written this, but the man she left it with had sense enough to place it where any one would see it outside the headman's hut," he said. "I don't know why they went away, but they are Kwaka's people and perhaps he sent for them."

"I don't think that is quite the point," said Millicent, a trifle sharply, and there was a just perceptible tinge of colour in her cheek.

Weland stood silent for almost a minute while the white mists crept out from the gloom between the cotton-wood trunks.

"I scarcely think either Mrs. Joynson or Mrs. Halifax contemplated this state of affairs," he said.

"That is evident. Of course they didn't. The question is, What is to be done?"

"Well," said Weland, quietly, though he had a purpose, "I don't think you could stay here. There are apt to be snakes and centipedes in these huts."

"I'm quite sure I couldn't," said the girl. "It isn't necessary to waste time pointing out the reasons."

"You could have the launch to yourself. I and the Kroo boy would sleep in the nearest hut."

Millicent remembered the horrible object they had passed that morning and shivered a little. "It is, perhaps, foolish, but I should be afraid."

"Then I can only suggest that you come down river with me," said the man. "We would reach the factory, where I expect the steamer is, almost as soon as Oppo-

notax, or I could take you right down to the outpost."

It had taken him some time to make the proposition, almost too long, in fact, but Millicent, who understood the reason, was sensible of a great relief.

"I think," she said quietly, though she did not look at him, "I should prefer that to—the snakes and centipedes."

Weland's laugh saved the position. "Then we'll get tea when I've prowled round the village to ascertain what took the niggers away," he said. "There's a long run before us and I can't drive the launch full speed in the dark."

He went ashore again with the Kroo boy and stayed a considerable time, while Millicent, who was distinctly glad to see him come back, noticed that his face was somewhat grave and wondered why he swung the launch out into the stream and anchored there while the Kroo boy cleaned the fire. Weland, however, deftly laid out a meal, and the misgivings she had felt vanished when she took her place at the little table. She could not see the forest now, for the lamp her companion hung up diffused a cheerful light, while a red glow streamed out from the open furnace door and beat into the dusky face of Frypan, the Kroo, who, grotesque in his tight jacket, which had burst at the seams, stirred the glowing fire.

"Doesn't this bring the days we spent at Halton back?" said Weland, who seemed to guess her thoughts as he handed her the teapot. "It was you who generally filled the cups when we sat at the little table in the hall. Still, there's no dinner to follow, so be warned."

Millicent laughed and was content, for it was evident he had recovered from the embarrassment he had, she fancied, also felt.

"It makes one feel how big England is," she said. "Its confines are not those ascribed to Great Britain and Ireland."

"I'm afraid it will make me feel Sapolto is very lonely

when I go back. After coming out from England it is the meal times that trouble one most."

"But you have a comrade?"

"Oh, yes," said Weland, "but Blower drinks whisky in place of tea and doesn't drink it prettily. Besides, a host of crawly, creeping things come and dine with us."

He spoke lightly, but Millicent noticed the momentary hardness of his face and felt a vague pity for the man who lived in the lonely bush. She was the more gracious to him because of it, and eventually led the conversation round to the Sapolto Ju-Ju.

"I almost fancy any one would grow superstitious if they lived long in this country," she said. "You believe in the Ju-Ju's efficacy?"

Weland laughed. "The bushmen do, and that is, perhaps, more to the purpose."

He called to the Kroo boy, and when he started the little engine the launch, swinging slowly round, swept away down stream.

"And you are determined to stay at Sapolto?" asked Millicent.

Weland smiled. "The fact that there are a good many coloured gentlemen who would like me to go away is almost sufficient to keep me there," he said.

IX

WHY WELAND CAME TO AFRICA

WITH engine throbbing and clanking the little launch sped on and the shadowy wall of forest streaked by drifting mists slid by. Eerie sounds came forth from it, rustlings in the undergrowth, patterings, amidst the leaves, and once more Millicent felt the influence of the dark land upon her. It was very hot, almost hotter

than in the afternoon, and the thick, oppressive steaminess more difficult to bear than the dazzling glare had been, while as the launch swept on through the haunts of fear and fever the girl felt her insignificance as she had never done before.

Then she glanced with a little thrill of understanding sympathy at the face of her companion, who leaned upon the tiller. A faint glow from the furnace door shone into it and showed its quiet forcefulness. Set lips and steady eyes that looked forward into the night told the same story, and she felt that whether he failed or not this man would at least, acquit himself honourably in the time of stress.

Weland, however, said nothing at all, and, though it was the last thing she had intended or desired to do, Millicent let her head sink back into the cushions and closed her eyes.

It was a little cooler when she awakened, and the launch was clanking on. A faint breeze flowed up to meet them between the walls of forest which had grown a trifle more visible, and Weland's face showed faintly under his big hat.

"I wonder," she asked him, "what brought you out to Africa—I meant eight years ago? It is a question a good many people seem to fancy themselves warranted in asking me."

Weland smiled somewhat dryly. "Don't you think it's a little risky? The usual one is—What did you do in England? It is not our good deeds that bring most of us here."

"The risk," said Millicent, reflectively, "would not, I think, be very great in your case. Of course, there is no reason why you should tell me."

"No," said Weland, with a little laugh. "Still, at the moment I can't think of any reason why I shouldn't. Before I had quite finished my education something happened which made it necessary that I should earn my livelihood as soon as possible."

"It was a necessity you had not previously contemplated?"

Weland smiled. "It was, but that is a little outside the question. The advertisement of a West African firm pictured this country in terms which captivated an adventurous young man's fancy, and the Company undertook to feed and pay me sixty pounds salary. They did not mention that it was also very likely they would be called upon to bury me."

"Was the country especially unhealthy then?"

"No," said Weland. "Not more than it is now. It was my age that presented the difficulty. English lads die where men not infrequently live healthily, but as it happened, the fever scarcely troubled me, and I spent a year or two with a drunken outcast counting salt-bags and gin bottles. Then I was sent up to Custine of Sapolto, the most reckless, resourceful, and softest-hearted rascal who ever set his foot in Western Africa. He taught me lessons every white man must learn in this country, showed me a short and comparatively risky way to prosperity, and left me with a very black account against Kwaka when he died."

"And you like the life you lead?"

Weland smiled curiously. "There are times when the necessary brutality and the loneliness pall on one. Then the black hours come, and one longs for the sight of an English face that is not hard with greed or debased with gin. I have, of course, had my fancies like other men, hopes of winning a competence to enjoy in a healthier land, and perhaps laying hold again of the little niceties of life and thought that are out of place in Africa."

Millicent, who noticed a somewhat unusual wistfulness in his tone, glanced at him covertly. "You think those hopes may be realized?"

"Yes," said Weland, whose face hardened. "If I am alive when this trouble is over I think they will."

Millicent fancied she understood him and was sensible

of a curious little thrill. This was, she felt, a man who would play for heavy stakes, and the game, it seemed, was now opening in the shadowy bush.

The sun was high when they came in sight of a little steamer lying against the bank, and when Weland ran the launch alongside, a lady rose from a big basket chair, and two little dusky soldiers with red tarbouches appeared on deck. She shook hands with Weland and then smiled at Millicent.

"I am glad you have got down safely, but I don't see Mr. Joynson or his wife," she said.

"No," said Weland, dryly. "It would be a little difficult because they are, I believe, both at Opponotax."

Mrs. Halifax glanced at Frypan the Kroo boy, who, perhaps, because minted currency is scarce in that country and not always above suspicion, was carefully inspecting a big silver coin.

"Then I presume that was the chaperon?" she said.

A little trace of colour crept into the girl's face, and Mrs. Halifax shook her head at her. "The boy will take your box into my room, Millicent," she said. "Sit down, Derrick, I want to talk to you."

The familiarity of the address did not escape the girl's attention, but she moved away, and Mrs. Halifax turned to the man.

"Jack's away. One of the bushmen shot the hut-tax man," she said. "If you will sit where the draught is you can smoke. I'd rather like it, and you will not have had a cigar since you left Opponotax. No? I thought as much?"

"I'm waiting somewhat apprehensively, madam," he said.

"I am pleased to see you realize what you have done."

"The point is that there was nothing else I could do," said Weland, dryly. "Mrs. Joynson was ill, and the Rev. Hammond had to go away. I couldn't leave Miss Gaskell alone at Shulimah, for there was nobody there,

though I almost fancy she would have preferred it to coming down with me."

"If she did," said Mrs. Halifax, "she would astonish me. Still, what had become of the Shulimah niggers? There were plenty of them when we came away."

"I don't know. That is a point I have been worrying about."

"You feel certain that Kwaka is hatching mischief?"

"Absolutely sure. There will be no peace in this country until an end is made of him."

Mrs. Halifax grew suddenly grave. "There are a good many who will not believe it yet, but I almost fancy you are right," she said. "That tax man was, it seems, shot with a rifle. You will get no thanks, Derrick Weland, but just now a good deal depends on you. The bushmen's eyes will be fixed on Sapolto, and they will forecast the attitude of the colony from what you and Blower do."

She smiled at him in a very kindly fashion when a few minutes later he bent over the hand she gave him with his big hat at his knee, and the smoke of his launch was just disappearing round a bend of the river when Millicent came back. She drew out a chair and sat down.

"Now," she said. "I presume you are going to scold me."

"You deserve it. Why didn't you stop at Shulimah?"

"I was afraid. It was so lonely, and he said there were snakes."

Mrs. Halifax's eyes twinkled. "Now he led me to believe that you wished to stay and he urged you to come with him."

"Would you have expected anything else from him?"

"From a gin-trader! They are not usually characterized by much delicacy."

"Mr. Weland has had a very different upbringing from most of them," said Millicent, with a trace of acerbity which did not escape her companion's attention.

"You have got that far?" she said. "Now, one has to arrive at a considerable degree of intimacy with Derrick Weland before he can be induced to allude to his own history."

"He told me very little, and I asked him a question that made it unavoidable," said Millicent, a trifle too hastily. "Only that he came out here because he had to earn a living. I surmised the rest."

"Then I am not sure that he was quite correct," said Mrs. Halifax, dryly. "I presume he did not mention his sister, or tell you that when his father died the trustees saved enough out of his involved affairs to have started him with strict economy in a profession?"

"No," said Millicent, whose face betrayed her interest. "I did not know he had a sister."

"He had, and turned all the money over for her benefit. She was two or three years younger than he was, and they had very few friends. He said he could make his own way and she must have a liberal education."

"What became of her?"

"She married a man with money, and I believe very seldom mentions her brother the gin-trader."

Millicent sat silent, watching the flaming water slide past, while Mrs. Halifax took up her book again.

In the meanwhile, Weland, who had as usual a good deal to do, was steaming up-river, and it was a week later when he sat with Blower in the living-room of the Sapolto factory one night. The rain roared upon the iron roof, the thick, muggy air was heavy with the hot smell of saturated earth, and the bare room appeared even more dingy and dreary than it usually did.

Blower, clad in very greasy duck, was whirling a native whipping stick in the cocktail jug, which was his usual occupation when not engaged with his books. The latter were, however, kept astonishingly well, and Weland admitted that there was some warranty for his comrade's not infrequent boast that very few accountants in the country could approach him at figures, even

though they were sober at the time and he was not. At last he looked up.

"I think there's somebody coming," he said. "It will be Tommy Ormond. Nobody else would be fool enough to be out on such a night."

It became evident that there was, at least, one man below, for a voice that anathematized the climate rose out of the rain.

"Do you expect me to keep my men out here, or have I got to break the store-shed door in before you come down?" the voice asked; and Blower, who went out into the verandah, leaned over the balustrade.

"Keep off that door," he said. "We can't have any policemen in there when there are goods lying about. I'm not coming down. It's too wet. Here's the key of the salt shed."

There was a splash below, and a man whose remarks about the book-keeper were vivid and indelicate paddled about in the water. He, however, apparently found the key, and by and by came up the stairway and into the room. The water ran from him, his big helmet had partly melted, and very little of his uniform was visible through the mud that clung about it. He flung himself down into a chair and reached out a wet hand for Blower's cocktail jug.

"Shall I send the boy for some hot oil chop?"

"This will do," said Ormond, who, drawing his chair to the table, fell to upon the sticky mess of oil and yams and flesh greedily. "I am going on to the creek fork village."

"You'll never get there," said Blower. "Inside five minutes you'll have your policemen in the river."

"Well," said Ormond, dryly, "I'll have a shot at it. It will wash a little of the bumptiousness out of the rascals anyway. The other man has been pampering them while I was away. Those beasts up yonder have been getting rifles. I presume you don't know anything about it?"

"No," said Weland, quietly.

Ormond sat silent a minute and his wet face grew stern.

"Well," he said, "you and I will have our hands full. If old Kwaka goes out the rest will join him, and they'll cut every friendly's throat before Halifax gets a move on. You're going to stay up here?"

"Until the last moment anyway. Then when the column comes up they'll find what I know about these swamps useful. The next few months will decide which is the biggest Ju-Ju, Kwaka's or mine."

"It's a trifle absurd, but you'll be worth a good company, at least. The damned bushmen believe in the thing. Well, there's another man means to stay on too. I looked in at Opponotax on my way, and couldn't quite keep my temper with Leslie. I told him he and Joynson had better clear out and get down river. Kwaka's men, I believe, turned the place into a shambles when they last came out. Still, nothing would induce him to go."

"I don't think I'm very much astonished."

"Well," said Tommy, wrathfully, "if the man is my cousin, is that any reason he shouldn't be an ass? Leslie's a believer in that mediæval nonsense—makes one feel he would like to stand on one leg on a column, or make pilgrimages on his knees, don't you know. Since he can't do that, he finds consolation in starving himself and worrying folks until they turn and trample on him. Still, it wasn't his fault he made a horrible mess of it a few years ago!"

"I haven't heard of that."

"I fancied I'd told you. He married a girl with big eyes and nothing else to recommend her. I think she used to confess to him. She was pretty in a dollyish fashion and not at all the kind for Leslie. A strong-minded woman with a temper would have rubbed some sense into him. Well—though, perhaps, it wasn't all her fault, for he's not a pleasant man to live with—she left him. It was some time before anybody knew where

she went to, and though there's tolerably clear evidence that she's dead, I don't think Leslie can quite persuade himself that she is. Any other man would have been certain of it from what I've heard of the affair. Anyway, he couldn't have been really fond of her. Of course, you will not mention this, and now I must be going."

He rose, shook hands with Weland and Blower, and went down the stairway, while five minutes later there was a trampling in the compound and a thin jingle of steel as he and his men flitted away into the rain.

X

WELAND MAKES HIS INTENTIONS KNOWN

DUSK was not far away when Weland and Blower sat chaffering with a bush trader in the living-room of the Sapolto factory. There was a goodly assortment of decorated cans, besides bottles and glasses, upon the table, and the negro who had emptied most of them was watching Weland with a good-humoured twinkle in his eyes.

"There are many monkeys in the bush just now," he said. "Every monkey has a skin, and those skins are getting dearer at the factories. It is also a good deal easier to kill a monkey than it is to find rubber or oil."

"The difficulty is that when a thing is plentiful it is generally cheap, while the thing which is scarce is dear," Weland said reflectively. "Now, it seems to me that everybody in this country is going to kill monkeys, and I fancy you would find it more profitable to collect rubber."

His purpose was, the negro fancied, comprehensible, and he smiled cunningly. "One has to take risks and I think I will make the venture. If skins are to be cheap you cannot ask too much for powder, and I am willing to make an offer for forty kegs."

He made it, and Blower flashed a swift glance at Weland, who, unseen by the negro, shook his head.

"I am afraid I cannot part with so much just now," he said. "I could, however, let you have five or six kegs."

The bushman sat silent a minute or so, and then increased his offer, which he did several times, until he had at last almost doubled it. Still Weland appeared unwilling to make the slightest concession.

"Six kegs. I can spare no more," he said. "I think it would pay you better to trap those monkeys."

The black trader, who apparently believed that the white man was endeavouring still further to enhance the price, stared at him in astonishment, and then stood up.

"I have bought most of my goods from Sapolto for four years, but I will not be robbed," he said. "I can get the powder from the men down river for very much less."

He went out without another word and Blower laughed. "I don't think he can," he said. "Powder's scarce down river since Langley put the screw on one or two of the men who bring most of it in. Still, it's a chance of piling up your commission you'll never get again, and after all you may be mistaken."

Weland smiled curiously. "I don't think I am. Isn't it significant that we have had almost every bush trader down asking for powder? Kwaka is cunning, and it would suit him better to buy a few kegs at a time through a broker. He can't come out without it and he has a battery of old guns behind his stockade."

"Well," said Blower, reflectively, "I'm not sure the Company will appreciate what you are doing, especially if he doesn't come out at all. There's another point. When Kwaka finds he can't buy powder it's quite likely he'll come down and take it."

"Then I scarcely think ours would be much use to him. It would be his last resource, and in the meanwhile every keg we have will be dumped into the river!"

"We are staying on?"

"Of course," said Weland, dryly. "That is, I am."

There was no indecision in Blower's face. "Then there's nothing more to be said. I'm going to see the thing through with you."

There was, as both of them understood, a good deal behind this decision, which, in view of the fact that Kwaka had a bitter grudge against the agent at Sapolto, was not one most men would have made without due consideration. It meant that the two lonely men would run a horrible risk, but it also meant that the fact that they stayed on would do much to maintain the white man's prestige, which is his chief defence in that country. Weland knew there were in the wilderness between Konnoto's and Kwaka's swamps many petty trading headmen who might be induced by fear or lust of plunder and excitement to join in what promised to be a successful mutiny, but who having no great liking for Kwaka would hesitate to commit themselves while there was any doubt about the issue.

There were also native traders who had sent him down oil and gums and rubber for which they had as yet taken nothing in exchange, and he had them to consider. The confidence of his customers is one of the most valuable assets a trader has in that country where lengthy credit is usual, and the promise of the agent at Sapolto stood good as a stamped contract for the delivery of many canoe loads of salt and gin and cotton. These men had trusted Weland and he recognized his obligation.

"I think," he said with a little smile, "we will have the flag up to-morrow."

Between the oil and salt sheds burned two little fires, and though it was at least as hot as usual, clusters of dusky men, naked save for a strip of waistcloth, lay about them eating their evening meal. It was not by accident they had divided into two parties, for some were woolly-haired Kroos with a blue stripe down their

foreheads from Liberia, and the rest of lighter colour with curiously knitted hair from Kwaka's country.

By and by one of the men from the bush country produced a little drum, and shuffling forward, in spite of the heat, crouched close beside the fire. For a minute or two there was no sound but the slow tap-tapping, and then the man, uplifting a musical voice, sang softly in an unknown tongue.

"At it again!" said Blower. "I don't like that song. Sends a kind of crawly feeling through me—it's too African. No doubt they've sung it for a thousand years or so, and there isn't a white man in the country knows what it means. Nothing would make them tell you either. They're exasperating devils."

The music broke off, there was a murmur from the negroes, a hoarse shout and a rush of feet, and Weland was out on the verandah a second later. The men with the knitted hair were still clustering about the fire with their faces all turned in the same direction, but the Kroo boys had fled towards their sleeping-shed, where they huddled about the doorway in evident apprehension. Between them and the fire stood an almost naked man with what appeared in the fading light to be strings of charms hung about him. He swung up one hand, and began a song or declamation in a high-pitched voice. None of the negroes stirred, but there was fear in the dusky faces the firelight fell upon, and save for that shrill, eerie voice a curiously impressive silence.

"Clever!" said Blower, hoarsely. "Devilish clever! I was looking right at the place and never saw him come. There's not going to be a boy left to-morrow unless you stop him."

Weland evidently concurred in this, for he sprang back into the room and there was a double-barrelled gun in his hands when he appeared again. Next moment his voice rang out sharply, but the song went on, and fixing his eyes on a spot a yard or two short of the stranger he flung up the gun. There was a flash, the

iron roof rang with the concussion, and a wisp of thin blue smoke that obscured the white men's vision drifted slowly out of the verandah. Then Weland looked at Blower and smiled curiously.

"If you could tell me which way that man went I'd be glad," he said.

"I couldn't," said Blower. "Nobody could. He's one of the Ju-Ju. Still, though it's not going to be the least use, we'll go down and look for him."

They went down and searched the compound, but, as they had expected, found no stranger there. It was stockaded all round except along the bank of the river, but no canoe had disappeared, and though the light was very dim they would have seen a swimmer. The sheds whose doors stood open were also empty, and Weland obtained very little satisfaction when he questioned Frypan, the Kroo.

"Them dam bushmen lib for come and then he lib for go," said the dusky Pagan, who was trembling a little. "No, sah. I not done savvy."

Weland and Blower went back to the living-room, where the latter lighted the lamp somewhat hastily. Then he beat up a frothy cocktail in the jug and smiled reassuringly when he had swallowed it.

"Now," he said, "I feel considerably better. I don't like those tricks. Of course, you never expected to get hold of him?"

Weland shook his head. "I'm almost sorry I didn't hold the gun a trifle higher," he said. "I warned Kwaka what these fellows might expect if he sent any of them here again. A trick, of course, but I don't think there's a white man in the country who knows how it is done."

"The question," said Blower, reflectively, "is what the meaning of it is?"

"Trouble!" and Weland's voice was sharp. "I wish I knew how it would come, but it's never very far away when you see a Ju-Ju man, and that fellow is one

of some consequence. It's only the higher orders who are well up in these tricks."

"Kwaka sent him?"

Weland, who did not answer, walked up and down the room, and then stopped again with decision in his face.

"I would feel a good deal less anxious if I knew why he did it," he said. "As I'm in doubt we'll play trumps by getting rid of every keg of powder at Sapolto now. Nobody knows what may happen before to-morrow."

One by one the Kroo boys came trotting to the river bank with little kegs upon their heads, and when Weland with a big axe smashed the end of each one in Blower poured out its contents into the sliding water. White men do not as a rule undertake much physical exertion in that country and the perspiration that soaked their thin garments dripped from both of them, but Weland toiled on grimly with the light of the flickering lanterns on his face, and Blower gasped as he kept pace with him.

There was blackness all about it, a darkness that swallowed the flitting figures with the woolly hair the moment they flung down their burdens. The pale blink of light also appeared to Blower significantly feeble, and he vaguely realized the rashness and probable futility of what they were doing.

Still the work went on. The powder shed grew empty, the pile of kegs rose higher, the Kroo boys panted as they flitted more slowly into the flickering light, and Blower wondered whether he would ever straighten his back again, until at last Frypan came up grinning.

"No more keg lib," he said.

"Let them have a half-case of gin," said Weland, flinging down his axe.

Blower did not sleep any more soundly than he usually did, and when at last the long, hot night wore through, went out into the verandah in his pyjamas and slippers. He had risen earlier than usual, why, he did not exactly know, though he was sensible of a desire to make sure

that all was right at the factory, but as he stood at the head of the stairway Weland came up it.

"What did you get up for?" asked Blower.

Weland smiled grimly. "I might," he said, "ask you the same question, but there's something more important to talk about. The up-river boys have gone!"

Blower stared at him blankly. "Gone!"

"Yes," said Weland, dryly, "every one. I had almost fancied they would have stood in with us through the trouble, and that is no doubt why Kwaka sent the Ju-Ju man for them. Still, I don't quite grasp his purpose."

Blower leaned over the balustrade and addressed a few questions to Frypan, who stood outside the sleeping-shed below. The Kroo, however, grinned and shook his head.

"Last night I go look them dam bushman lib for shed," he said. "Now he go lib for somewhere else."

"He knows nothing," said Blower. "You couldn't expect him to. He never does. Well, it's tolerably certain they'll tell Kwaka what we've done, and now, as you suggested, we'll make our meaning plainer still."

He disappeared and the sun was just clearing the forest when he came back with a bundle of faded and frayed bunting in his arms. He bent it to the halyard rolled into a ball, which he ran up to the top of the lofty staff, and then gravely took his hat off as with a sharp jerk he broke out the flag. For a moment its folds dropped limply and then slowly shook themselves out of the faint hot breeze until the quartered crosses of the union were revealed, and as a sun ray touched it the crimson gleamed.

"Make it well fast," said Weland, with a little grim smile. "The bushmen will slip through the creeks by night as well as day, and every one who sees that flag will know why it's there. While I and headman Kwaka live it will not come down again."

XI

ORMOND WATCHES THE RIVER

THERE was not a breath of wind, and the mists, which rose earlier than usual that evening, had rolled their woolly folds about the cottonwood trunks when Lieutenant Ormond stood somewhat wearily upon a narrow strip of sand fretted by the yellow waters of the Sapolto river. His head ached, as did almost every joint in his body, and a good deal of crusted mire clung about his badly-rent uniform.

A big dusky sergeant with Arab blood in him, from the land beyond the forest, stood at his side, but he was spick and span in threadbare serge uniform, with belt and bandolier girt about him. He held the steel rod he cleaned his rifle with in one hand, and now and then shook it warningly at the half-naked negro who stood close by, evidently in a state of considerable apprehension, while another sat in the light canoe whose bow was drawn out on the sand. Such means of extracting information are not sanctioned by the British Administration in any part of Africa, but Lieutenant Ormond had now and then found them efficacious.

"Give him another tap," he said. "There was a good deal in the other man's story I did not understand, and I would like to hear this one tell it again. Then if they're both the same one could, perhaps, believe a little of it."

The negro cringed and rubbed his tingling legs while he glanced at his comrade in the canoe as if for some hint of what he had said, for Ormond had taken the precaution of examining them separately.

"Be merciful and I will tell you what I know," he said. "We passed three big canoes coming up river, with the men paddling hard, at night. They had not

left the factory down river because we would have seen them there and they would not tell us where they were going. On the next day we found a split in our canoe. It is there to show we tell the truth—the white man can see it—and we pulled her out and spent that day looking for gum to stop it. It was late at night when we went on again, and yet though the three canoes should have been far in front of us we passed them again, paddling hard up river in the darkness. Where they came from, or where they are now, I do not know, but they were big and heavy and they travelled slow.”

Ormond asked several questions through the sergeant before he made quite sure of the man's meaning and then looked at him fiercely. “It is fortunate for you that I think the tale is true,” he said. “Take him up to the outpost and give him a piece of cloth and two bottles of gin, Sergeant Samadu.”

The sergeant did as he was bidden, and when the negroes went on their way up the river again walked back to where Ormond stood.

“I would very much like to know where those canoes came from and why they only travelled at night,” said the latter.

“That,” said the dusky sergeant, reflectively, “might be because they did not wish anybody to see them.”

Ormond smiled. “I shouldn't wonder if it was. You're quite brilliant now and then,” he said in English. “Still that only alters the question. Why didn't the bushmen want any one to see them, or, and it comes to the same thing, what had they got in the canoes? If they try to slip past here I'm going to find out. Samadu, I'm afraid you'll have to do without your sleep and keep four men under arms to-night. Then there's the other point—where did they come from? It was not the down-river factory, because those bushmen would have seen them there, and you can't paddle a canoe through the bush!”

The sergeant, who evidently understood at least the

drift of these observations, nodded. "It is certain," he said. "The white man is wonderfully wise."

"Then it seems to me they must have come down the Falloon creek," he said. "Still, the canoes were loaded, and nothing ever comes up river from that country."

Samadu shook his head. "There are no white men in it and the bushmen have nothing to sell, but the old slave road runs from the head of that river to the coast," he said. "Now and then the bushmen go down that way."

"Two men will watch the river until sunrise, Samadu," he said. "I am to be sent for the moment they hear paddles. We will see what happens."

The dusky sergeant, raising his hand in salute, swung round, and Ormond, who went back to the outpost, swallowed a very indifferent meal of canned stuff. Then he crawled into his travelling hammock because there was nothing else he could sit or lie upon except the floor.

Darkness closed down suddenly, the white mist crept, sour and steamy, into the room, and it began to rain. There was a steady, throbbing roar upon the worn-out iron roof, and rivulets soon streamed across the floor. At last a shout came out of the deluge and a dripping man flung open the door.

"Canoe lib!" he said.

Ormond sprang from his hammock and went out into the rain, which in less than a minute beat his thin, saturated garments flat against his skin, while he stood ankle deep in water looking about him. There was nothing visible, but from the sound they made he surmised that two or three of the policemen were dragging a canoe down a few yards away. He got into her when they bade him, a dusky object thrust the craft off, and immediately black darkness swallowed them.

Ormond could scarcely see the man in front of him, but he could hear a faint, rhythmic sound. It stole

out of the deluge, a steady thud-thud that rose and fell with a regular beat in it, three strokes with the last accentuated, then a little rest and three more again. He also recognized it as the beat of paddles, the great six-foot spear-shaped blades with which the river men drive the big dug-outs up stream.

Where the latter were he could not tell, for the sound was flung back by the wall of dripping forest and dulled by the rain, and he resigned himself to wait while four policemen dipping their paddles drove the canoe out-shore. They swung down with the stream, and the regular thudding sound grew a trifle louder, while the short pause between the strokes became emphasized.

Then one of the policemen shouted, there was a sudden whirling of paddles, and close in front of them a long black blur slid out of the rain. Tommy had a momentary vision of a row of shadowy objects that swung forward and straightened themselves again, and then grabbed a paddle to turn the canoe's head up stream. The current that had been sweeping her down sideways, however, caught her bow, and while the policemen taxed each muscle the blurred shape forged past them and was swallowed by the night. By the time the canoe had rounded to there was no sign of her, and the rhythmic thud-thud that had apparently increased in volume became broken and irregular.

"Steady!" said Ormond. "Let her drift. There's another coming up close behind."

They rested on their paddles a full minute endeavouring to locate the sound, but nothing became visible, and when it grew a trifle fainter Ormond once more dipped his blade.

"Them dam bushman he lib for up river, sah," said the dusky sergeant.

Ormond swung his hand up, for it was evident that the craft had slid past them while they waited, and the canoe surged forward as four paddles came down together. The men were fresh, and savage from the

thrashing of the rain; the canoe was light and long, with some two feet six as extreme beam, and she seemed to lift and quiver at every stroke as with great black muscles swelling they drove her up stream. Ormond could hear the paddles in front of him as, crouching on the matting, he dipped the steering blade, but they seemed to grow little nearer, and he knew his men could not keep up that pace long.

So while the thud-thud grew slightly louder and was flung back by the forest the chase went on, dusky men gasping as they swung, while Ormond felt his arms grow heavy and the veins on his forehead swell as he toiled with his paddle astern.

Then a hazy outline grew into visibility, a smear of blackness more solid than the surrounding night, without shape or definite form, and the canoe swerved when two of the policemen slackened their stroke. Next moment the four blades came down together with Ormond's in the stern, there was a confused shouting, a crash of paddles ground between craft and craft, and they were alongside. Ormond seized the stranger's gunwale and swung himself on board, but the canoe lurched beneath him as he sprang, and he plunged into a cane or fibre awning, and lay floundering enmeshed in it a moment or two. When he crawled clear again three policemen with rifles stood about him, and another held the canoe alongside, while a cluster of shadowy men were huddled together in the dug-out's stern.

Tommy gasped out a few questions in as much of the bush tongue as he was acquainted with, and then stopped abruptly, for there was a splash in the river. He could scarcely see the men in front of him, but one of them who seemed to wear a jacket of some kind laughed.

"Dam silly bushman, sah," he said. "Afraid too much. Lib for river."

Ormond was somewhat astonished, for the negro who employs the term bushman contemptuously to designate

an untamed comrade from the wilds usually aspires to be considered civilized himself.

"A damned factory nigger! Who the devil are you?" he said.

"Cappy Weland boy, sah," said the negro.

Ormond dropped his hand to his side with a grimace of disgust and there was a little murmur from the policemen. He had, it seemed, got himself wet through for nothing and wasted a good deal of strenuous effort.

"Where you lib for?" he said.

"Sapolto, sah," said the negro.

This appeared conclusive, but Ormond was a trifle dubious still.

"What you got?" he persisted.

"Trade gun, sah."

"If you can get a light I'll have a look at them. If not you'll come back with me to the outpost."

A man wriggled under the thatch awning and presently crawled out again holding up what seemed to be a very well-made lantern. Ormond took it from him and turned the light upon his companions. They were naked save for a waist-cloth, big men with knitted hair, and the rain ran off them, but though there was, he fancied, a suggestion of anxiety or apprehension in their faces, he recognized two of them and turned with a little nod to the dusky sergeant.

"They're Weland's boys," he said.

The sergeant made a little gesture of disgust, and Ormond turned to the man who wore the jacket again.

"Them other canoe lib for Sapolto too?" he said.

"One time, sah," said the negro. "Cappy Weland he done say come up quick too much."

"Well," said Ormond, "where have you got the guns?"

The man drew more of the awning back, and Ormond, who raised the lantern, sat down on one of the deal cases piled beneath it and flashed the light upon the rest. They were exactly the kind in which the trade guns are usually packed.

Now, while it is a serious offence to supply a negro with percussion, breech-loading arms, any trader who can pay the import duty may stock and sell the long flintlock guns which are not supposed by the Administration to be dangerous to any one but the man who fires them. The naked bushman, however, knows that they suit his purpose just as well as a rifle, for he seldom risks a long shot at his adversary, and prefers to lie in wait beside the forest path with a handful of trader powder and two of broken-up iron cooking pot well rammed down the long barrel. Then, if the flint does not miss fire, it is not difficult to blow a good-sized hole in his unsuspecting neighbour's back, while if this is not accomplished, the broken pot spreads considerably and a piece or two is very apt to disable the victim.

Ormond was at last contented, though he wondered why the man with the jacket was still evidently a trifle uneasy, while he had appeared in no way concerned as to what had become of the one who had jumped into the river.

"Get the men back into the canoe, Samadu. We lib for go home one time," he said.

It was, however, half an hour before they found the outpost, and more time had passed when Tommy, who contrived to lay hands upon clothing a trifle drier than that he flung off, once more crawled into his hammock. Then, though his head ached and his joints ached, he grew sleepy, and when Sergeant Samadu, carrying a flickering lamp, looked into the room, Ormond blinked at him vacantly.

"Now," he said, "I wonder why those bushmen who got the gin told me that story?"

His head fell back and his eyes shut before the dusky sergeant could think of any reason, and turning round he went out softly.

XII

MRS. KONNOTO GROWS ANXIOUS

THERE was clear moonlight overhead, but the stray shafts of brightness that streamed down between the cottonwood branches only emphasized the darkness below, when Weland groped his way up the miry creek that led to Konnoto.

Four Kroo boys, neatly draped in white cotton, dipped the paddles, and Weland crouched astern watching for rotting log or mud-bank that might arrest their progress.

Konnoto had dealings with the Sapolto factory, taking out salt and cloth and gin as he required them, and now and then sending produce down to be placed to his credit, but these consignments had been scarce of late, and Weland had gone up to see what he could obtain against the account, which had grown larger than he cared about.

At last a patch of moonlight grew brighter ahead and the canoe slid out into a wider strip of water, from which the trees fell back. A flotilla of loaded canoes moored stem to stern were left behind and Weland ran his craft in alongside the hard-trodden bank, which he noticed was now defended by a strong stockade. Two dusky men took charge of the canoe, the four Kroo boys scrambled ashore and kept close behind Weland, who looked about him observantly as he walked up a broad sandy avenue.

Here and there a towering cottonwood rose amongst the ranks of heavily-thatched mud-built huts, from whose doorways dusky faces peeped at him, while through the openings between he could see groves of bananas and the patches of cultivation where the yams and cassava grew. Everything he saw suggested tran-

quail prosperity, and yet his eyes grew more intent as he proceeded, until he came out into the wide palaver square, on one side of which stood the headman's house.

Signing to the Kroo boys, who squatted in the moonlight, he went up the short stairway to the verandah and stopped a moment in front of two dusky men draped in loose white cotton who stood with flintlock guns at the shoulder at the head of it.

"Order arms!" he said.

The flintlocks came down with a thud and Weland smiled.

"I wonder who taught you that," he said.

The men made no sign of comprehension, which Weland had not, however, expected, and the latter looking up saw Konnoto in the doorway. He was dressed in white duck and a red velvet jacket, and appeared to be smiling a trifle uneasily.

"How are you, my dear fellow?" he said. "I would have been at the landing had I expected you quite so soon. You were looking at my men there. One has to make a little show of this kind. The bushmen expect it."

Weland laughed. "Of course!" he said. "They seem to know their drill, and I almost fancied I had seen one of them before. Custine told me that when he once went up to see Kwaka he was received in state by a hundred spearmen."

"You must have been mistaken. These fellows are very like each other," said Konnoto, who seemed a trifle anxious to change the subject. "You were never at Kwaka's place?"

"No, and I have no great wish to go. Visitors Kwaka is not on very good terms with run the risk of staying there altogether."

Konnoto laughed, though Weland fancied he had not asked the question without a purpose. "I fancy Kwaka is not quite so deep in colour as some folks have painted him," he said. "Dinner will be ready as soon

as you have had a change, and my steward will look after the boys."

Half an hour later Weland sat down opposite Mrs. Konnoto at an English walnut table in a big room with a floor of hard-trodden mud. A punkah of gaudy silk stirred the heavy air, though punkahs are by no means usual in the houses of dusky headmen in Western Africa, or, indeed, in those of the white traders, and the windows were open wide, but the place was very hot and permeated with a curious musky smell.

The oil chop was excellent, the wines were good, and Konnoto showed himself a tactful host, while it was not until the meal was finished that either of the men mentioned business. Then when Konnoto laid out a cigar box his wife looked up.

"If Mr. Weland doesn't mind I'd like to stay," she said. "It seems such a long while since we've seen a white man or you have been here at night, and I'll sit very quiet."

There was a curious wistfulness in her voice, and Weland, who felt sorry for the lonely woman, made a fitting answer. Then he turned to his host.

"Your account with the Company is rather a heavy one and I should be glad if you can send us anything down we could credit you with," he said. "One feels it advisable to reduce one's liabilities in these uncertain times."

Konnoto thoughtfully regarded his cigar. "To be candid, I am a little hard up just now. Of course, I will let you have what I can, but my situation much resembles yours—it is difficult to get in anything from my bush customers."

Weland smiled. "I was hoping that was not the case with you since I heard that Brancker's people on the coast had just got in a consignment of the finest gum that ever came out of the Konnoto creeks. I wonder if the bushmen have been treating you quite fairly?"

"Since you have heard of that consignment there is

nothing to be gained by concealing the fact that it was sent down by me. I, however, scarcely think that will astonish you."

"No," said Weland dryly. "I had guessed as much already."

Konnoto made a little deprecatory gesture. "You shall have the next, but the fact is I had arranged with Brancker to take the goods against an exchange on an English bank. They had some rather heavy payments to make on my account. One spends a good deal of money in England. Fashionable follies—and that sort of thing, you know!"

"He must have been horribly extravagant, though I'm sure I didn't cost him much," his wife broke in. "If you had seen the canoe loads he has had to send down to pay the bill."

"You really consider the times uncertain?" said Konnoto.

"The bushmen evidently do. Still, you should be better informed upon that point than I am."

"I would scarcely care to express an opinion. A good deal depends upon Kwaka, and I naturally do not know what his intentions are. I am not by any means an intimate friend of his."

Weland, who looked up swiftly, noticed a curious expression, which partly suggested astonishment, in Mrs. Konnoto's face, but it vanished as soon as she became aware that he was watching her.

"It would not be difficult to crush him. You, who have been in England, should realize that," he said suggestively.

Konnoto smiled a trifle drily. "The question is, Would you consider it worth while? The spending of much money on West African troubles does not, as you are quite aware, usually commend itself to your Government at home. You understand the position?"

"I'm not quite sure that I do."

"Well, we will assume that Kwaka did come out and

beat the detachments hastily sent up. That would bring every bushman in to join him, and he would then, I think, retire to his swamps, from which any army corps could scarcely turn him out. What happens then? The Administration ascribes his retreat to Major Halifax's operations and sends up Langley to patch up peace. They would be very unwilling to admit their inability to manage their own affairs by applying for assistance from the Imperial forces. As a result, Kwaka gets every restriction he objects to removed and is left to all intents and purposes supreme in the swamps."

Weland sat silent a moment or two, for it appeared to him that there was a good deal to warrant this view.

"The trouble is that while Kwaka has a long head his Ju-Ju men might force his hand," he said. "We, of course, do not object to a little bullying as you suggest, but there are limits."

Konnoto brought his hand down passionately on the table. "That," he said, "is the difficulty. If the Administration would listen to me they would hang every man in the hierarchy. The brutes are the blackest curse on this unfortunate country."

He stopped with a curious abruptness and glanced at the door and window, after which he laughed, but not very heartily.

"The Ju-Ju humbug is," he said, "an unpleasant subject to me, and to change it we will take a wider view. There are up yonder beyond our forests very grim soldier nations, the brown men with the Arab blood in them. They do not like you, and your Anglo-French agreements about their country are the sorriest kind of joke. You would expend an army division before you enforced them. Your rulers, I think, know it. Well, we will assume that a swamp headman demonstrated the hollowness of your prestige, and those men, who do not like you, came down led by Moslem Emirs, who would throw away a battalion on one machine gun and smash your

squares with naked spearmen. Could you turn back that host, my friend?"

"The point," said Weland, "is that they will never come. They are too busy up there, Emir and petty Sultan, cutting each other's throats."

Konnoto laughed. "One can never be sure of anything, especially in Africa. Well, I will see what we have in our store sheds that might meet your views, and Mrs. Konnoto will keep you company in the meanwhile."

He went out and his wife rose. "If you wouldn't mind sitting on the verandah, it is hot in here," she said, and dropped her voice a little. "There are two or three of the boys who speak English."

She glanced towards the door, as her husband had done, and there was something that unpleasantly suggested apprehension in her attitude as she stood still a moment, apparently listening. Then she passed out into the lighted verandah and pointed to a chair in the shadow.

"Light a cigar. I want you to. They know Konnoto generally comes out here to smoke," she said.

Weland did as he was bidden and then looked at her steadily. "You had a reason for that?"

"I had," she said.

"I wonder if one could ask how you like this place?"

"I think you can be trusted," and the girl, sitting silent a moment, watched him covertly. "I don't like it at all—it makes me afraid."

Weland nodded gravely. "I understand. I have felt like that," he said.

"Then you can realize what it is to a woman—alone—up here." She stopped a moment and then proceeded impulsively, while a little flush crept into her pallid cheeks. "It's not my husband. Konnoto's as kind as he dares to be, and there aren't any more wives. It's the feeling that there's no one else but him between the rest and me. They don't like me—and I think he's afraid of them."

"He will find it necessary to consider their prejudices now and then. One can't expect too much from the bushmen, but, after all, he is the headman," said Weland reassuringly.

"Headman, when those crawling Ju-Ju men hold the whip over him!" and the girl's voice rang sharply. "If he had been an ordinary ignorant nigger he would have had their heads cut off, but because he's civilized they distrust him. Now if I had my way, I'd——"

She stopped and caught up a little whip of raw hide that lay close by as a negro in white cotton came softly out of the room behind them carrying a tray. It occurred to Weland that the man had appeared somewhat suddenly. The girl, who rose, stood in front of him a moment with a spot of crimson in either cheek and a little hard glitter in her eyes, and then the stinging whip twice descended upon the negro's shoulders.

"Take it away one time," she said. "Lib for crawl up that way before I send for you again and I'll cut the skin off you!"

The man, who said nothing, slunk away, and Mrs. Konnoto dropped the whip and sat down again, a trifle limply.

"I feel sure that man talks English," she said. "The women you have been accustomed to don't beat people, but they haven't lived up here. Still, I'll make these brutes afraid of me. You see, I have to."

She sat still a moment gasping a little, while the laces that drooped from the neck of her white dress rose and fell, and then laughed harshly.

"Being a headman's wife isn't really very nice," she said.

Again Weland was sensible of a curious pity for her.

"If there is anything I could do for you!" he said.

Mrs. Konnoto took out a purse. "You could get me a little pistol, one that's light and could be hidden in my dress and still could be relied upon. I don't care how much it costs. You might slip a piece of paper

telling me how to load it among the cartridges, but you will not tell Konnoto."

Weland considered for a moment or two and then walked softly towards the door of the room. When he came back he drew his chair further into the shadow, and taking a pistol from an inner pocket, pushed out the cartridges. He felt that the woman could be trusted.

"You put them in like this!" he said. "The chamber slips in here and you snap it together. Now I will take them out again. Then you have only to look along the rib of the barrel at your mark, and when that little wedge is on it draw the trigger. Let me see you do it. No—keep your hand quite steady and rather press than pull. You shouldn't drag down the muzzle."

The girl's fingers trembled a little, but she accomplished it. "That is right?" she said.

"Yes," said Weland. "Now put the cartridges in."

The girl did it and Weland smiled as he handed her back the purse. "One always throws something in with an African bargain, and as your husband is sending down goods to me you shall have the pistol. Still, has it struck you that there might be trouble here by and by and you would be safer down river?"

His companion's face grew wistful, but she shook her head. "Konnoto has been kind to me," she said. "I've got to see him through."

"Then you have realized that there is trouble coming?"

"Yes. I feel almost sure. They're plotting something all the time, and—it can't do any harm to tell you—Konnoto goes out at night with the Ju-Ju men. I think they make him. He doesn't put all his clothes on, and when he came back last time they had tattooed marks on him."

Weland nodded gravely. "I don't think you need be anxious, and I am only sending you the pistol because you might feel more comfortable when you had it, but

keep your husband out of Kwaka's hands," he said. "Of course, if you did get a little nervous at any time and sent word to me I would be glad to see you safely down river."

His companion's lips trembled a little, but she shook her head decisively. "Oh, I quite understand," she said. "Still, they can't drive me out. Let them try!"

In another few minutes Konnoto came up the stairway and smiled at them.

"Been having a pleasant talk about old times and what you did in England?" he said.

"Now, don't you ask questions. You weren't here, any way," said his wife, with a little laugh which Weland surmised cost her an effort. "You can have Mr. Weland now."

She rose and left them and the two proceeded to the great thatched sheds where the produce was kept. They spent some time in them, and next morning Weland, who did not see Mrs. Konnoto again, went back to Sapolto with three or four big loaded canoes. When he arrived there Blower glanced at him questioningly.

"That's all you got?" he said.

Weland nodded. "It's also about all there was," he said. "He had let Brancker have everything that would fetch a big price already. He got an exchange on an English bank for it. The question is why he's sending so much money to England."

"Anything else strike you?" said Blower.

"Yes. He has been drilling the bushmen, and I fancy I saw one of Tommy Ormond's policemen there. No doubt he's musketry instructor. Tommy was very angry when two of them bolted, you will remember. There was also a case in the store shed which I believe held rifles."

"What made you think that?"

Weland laughed. "Konnoto's evident anxiety to keep me away from it. They've been putting the marks on him. I saw Kwaka's Ju-Ju man there."

Blower appeared thoughtful. "It all means the same thing," he said. "Kwaka has him and we haven't long to wait until they open the game."

XIII

MRS. HALIFAX SPEAKS HER MIND

THE sea breeze which tempered the heat had died away, and it was very still when Thomas Ormond sat on the verandah of Major Halifax's house one afternoon. Tommy blinked at his host languidly, for he had snatched but a few hours' sleep during the long journey he had just accomplished.

"Yes," he said slowly, "I lost two men. Of course, I got the bushmen who did it. The brute had a rifle. He wouldn't have had a chance of firing more than the one shot if it had been a flintlock."

Langley, who sat opposite to him, screwed his glass tighter into his eye. "If you could, without taxing your memory, too much, contrive to furnish a few particulars, I should be glad," he said. "The report you sent down was, as your reports usually are—ah—somewhat fragmentary."

"Well," said Tommy, dryly, "you can fill up as much foolscap as appears advisable yourselves, but I've saved you the rest of the trouble. The man's dead—he had six Martini bullets in him. The bushmen had been chopping oil again."

Major Halifax made a sign of comprehension, for the chopping of oil was, though banned by the British Administration, a time-honoured custom in that country, and not infrequently gave rise to a good deal of trouble. It consisted in a creditor seizing any produce he could conveniently lay his hand upon, and then informing the man it belonged to that he was at liberty to recover its value with contingent expenses from the recalcitrant debtor.

"I fancied Langley had stopped that game," he said.

Tommy grinned. "It seems as if he hasn't," he said. "The bushmen really don't worry themselves very much about the rules you make down here, and the Arkana headman came to me boiling over because some of them had chopped his gum. He attached much less importance to the fact that during the trouble that followed it two of his boys got killed."

"I should like to point out that you alluded to the produce seized as oil a minute or two ago," said Langley reflectively.

"Oil," said Tommy, "is the usual thing—this time it was gum. Anyway, I sent word to Kwaka and Konnoto that the men who shot those boys must be sent down to me. The men were not forthcoming, and when Arkana fancied he'd found out where they were I went up to look for them. I had six men with me, and we were blundering along a bush path in single file when there was a flash behind a tree. I'd been out two nights already with the fever on me, or I'd have seen it was a rifle and gone to work differently. As it was, the corporal sat down with his face all drawn up and wriggled horribly, though that wasn't astonishing when we found out where he'd got the bullet in him, and the rest of us made a traverse round the smoke. The sergeant was quick about it and we cut the brute's line of retreat. Then he got in among the roots of a big cottonwood and wouldn't come out when I asked him. He drilled the second man while we rushed him."

"That," said Major Halifax, "is plain enough for anybody. The point is that if he'd gone out with a flintlock Tommy would have got him without any more trouble once he was headed off."

"I rather think it's where he got that rifle from," said Langley. "I presume you—ah—examined it, Ormond? Filched from the outpost, most likely!"

"No rifles are ever filched from an outpost when I'm in it. It was almost new and not a service rifle."

"It seems to me that one of the up-river traders must have run a lot through as flintlock guns," Langley said. "The question's—ah—quite a serious one. You have some notion who it was, Ormond?"

Tommy's uneasiness became evident. "It's a horribly unpleasant thing to mention, and I can't believe what the circumstances seem to point to. Still, I stopped Weland's boys trying to slip past the old outpost one night in a deluge, and the canoes were full of cases. They told me they had flintlock guns in them."

Halifax seemed thoughtful. "I feel very dubious myself, but the thing has a confoundedly unpleasant appearance. Weland's boys were, as everybody knows, the only ones likely to get through with the cases unopened just now. He might have counted on it—I don't say he did. I'd back a bill for Weland any time he asked me. Still, I never met a trader who was very particular when he could make a hundred per cent. profit."

Langley, who concurred with him, asked apposite questions, and Tommy's unwilling answers made the case blacker against his friend, until at last he stopped with a very unpleasant expression in his face.

"Now," he said grimly, "you know all that I do, and I have only told you because it appeared my duty. Since you have got the facts, I'll let you have my opinions too. It's only——"

Langley rose with a little sardonic smile. "One wouldn't wish to be uncomplimentary, but I fancy the facts are—ah—worth the most," he said.

He went away, and when Tommy also strode out of the verandah, Major Halifax sat still with more than a trace of concern in his bronzed face until Millicent and his wife came in.

"Something has been worrying you, and Tommy Ormond scarcely seemed quite as good-tempered as usual when he went away," said the little lady.

"No," said Halifax, dryly, "I don't think he was

Weland, it seems, has been supplying the niggers with rifles, and Tommy, who has come down with evidence that would convict him anywhere, says he doesn't believe he did it. Now, I don't set up to be a very logical man myself."

"We will see," and a little smile flickered in Mrs. Halifax's eyes. "Do you mind repeating what Tommy told you to Millicent and me?"

Halifax, who, though his friends rated it far higher, believed his wife's discretion to be almost the equal of his own, did as he was asked, perhaps because he desired to set his mind at rest. Then the little lady glanced at Millicent.

"Would the story you have heard lead you to believe that Derrick Weland would make a profit by selling the bushmen rifles to kill his countrymen with?"

"No," said Millicent, almost sharply, "the thing is absurd on the face of it."

The Major straightened himself impatiently in his chair. "It is easy for you to take that view, my dear," he said to his wife. "You can afford to force your opinions on people. It's your husband folks hold responsible—but what am I to do? The man—and I used to believe in him—is on his way down river. He'll be here to-morrow."

"I'm not quite sure you are expected to do anything. Meet him as you always do. Isn't it Langley and the Administration's affair?"

It was on the following evening when he and Mrs. Halifax and Millicent proceeded in hammocks to a big white building perched on what appeared to be the healthiest spot on all the slope of hill. It looked down upon the ocean, and the fresh sea breeze swept through its wide verandahs, great bare rooms, and cool stone corridors, but the insidious malaria had contrived to find an entrance there, and when the Major and his party passed between rows of dusky servants in snowy cotton into a big room, a little haggard man who had

just risen from a sick bed stood very wearily near the entrance. His sword had won him fame in earlier days, and now he was there, with a discretion the English Cabinet entrusts to very few men, to preside over the destinies of a dark and, with the exception of the few coast settlements, distinctly savage land.

He was, however, at the moment talking to a man dressed very simply in spotless duck, while a stately lady younger than himself, who came out for a week or two in the healthiest season, stood a little apart from them with a great diamond blazing on her neck.

"We will wait a little," said Major Halifax. "The headman is talking to Weland now, and doesn't seem especially pleased. He has a trick of flicking you on a raw place when that is the case."

Mrs. Halifax smiled. "One would scarcely consider that Weland looked very like a guilty man," she said. "Does he, Millicent?"

Millicent said nothing, but she agreed with her companion as she glanced down the great brilliantly-lighted room. It was sprinkled with little groups of men in conventional evening dress, as well as two or three in duck and serge uniform, and a few white women, and the warm land breeze blew in through the windows that were open wide. Yet she saw very little beyond the fever-wasted soldier and the white-clad trader at his side. The latter held himself stiffly, with his head erect, and looked the headman almost too steadily in the face. Only the lady with the diamond heard what they were saying, and she, it was evident, did not consider it worthy of much mention.

"I have to thank you for your warning, which is scarcely borne out by the news I have from other sources," said the headman. "One cannot, however, help concluding that your desire to keep us well posted is—it is the most appropriate term I can think of—a trifle inconsistent."

"You have seen Mr. Langley, sir?" said Weland,

who had been interviewed by the Commissioner in the meanwhile.

"I have," and the headman smiled dryly. "It is my custom, as you know, to see him every day when he is here. I was also considerably disturbed—and a little astonished—by something he told me."

Weland's face grew almost stern, and the headman noticed how he met his eyes. "Then I should be glad to have an opportunity of making my defence."

"It would, I think," and the headman appeared reflective, "be a little unnecessary. You have already, as I observed from the notes laid before me, pointed out the difficulty of proving one or two of Commissioner Langley's conclusions and I am inclined to agree with your opinions. One cannot rely absolutely upon deductions."

"Then you hold that the charge is quite confuted, sir?"

"I have made none, and I think I may tell you that unless something further transpires I do not intend to. The evidence is, as you contended, scarcely sufficient to warrant it."

Weland flushed a little, and though his voice was deferential there was a hard glint in his eyes.

"I am," he said, "not acquitted, sir?"

Had Weland not been a proud man he would have gone at once, but, as it happened, he was standing where the light shone full upon him, feeling himself very much alone, when Major and Mrs. Halifax approached him. It is very probable that the little lady knew every eye in the room, including those of the headman, was upon her, but she smiled at Weland as she held out her hand.

"I consider your conduct reprehensibly unfriendly," she said in a voice that was meant to carry far. "You have been in this place twenty-four hours at least without coming to see me."

"I fancy your husband knows why I did not come," he said. "I am not quite sure that he would have been very pleased to see me."

Major Halifax appeared distinctly ill at ease, but he made a little deprecatory gesture. "I, at least, never go back upon what my wife says or -does," he said. "Come whenever you find it convenient. If she believes in you it's quite enough for me."

She turned away with Weland, who looked at her gravely. "I appreciate your kindness, madam," he said. "Still, are you wise?"

"I can't ask you whether you did it," said Mrs. Halifax, disconnectedly.

"I didn't, anyway."

"Then I fancy that anybody I hear trying to infer you did will be sorry for himself."

They had passed through an archway into a smaller room by this time, and before Weland could answer his companion glanced towards Millicent, who was talking to Mrs. Captain Padget.

Weland was not quite sure how it came about, but he was shaking hands with Millicent a minute or two later. Then he would have turned away but that the girl detained him.

"You seem in haste to get rid of me?" she said.

Weland looked at her gravely. "The fact is I'm not sure I should have spoken to you at all," he said. "I am, as you may have noticed, under a cloud."

Millicent met his gaze and there was a little smile in her eyes. "I think you once pointed out that I could not afford to do as much as Mrs. Halifax," she said. "It really wasn't flattering, but I should like to show you that you were wrong. Now don't you think it would be very much cooler in the verandah? I want to give you a message for Mrs. Joynson."

Weland made no further demur, but as he made his way towards a corridor Millicent laid her hand upon his arm. "That isn't the nearest way," she said, "Is there any special reason why you should avoid the hall?"

She smiled at him bravely and Weland bent his head. "I shall always remember this," he said.

They passed through the big lighted room, Weland holding himself very straight, the girl smiling at his side, and the headman glanced at Mrs. Halifax, who was then beside him. "I had a high opinion of your sagacity, madam. You assume some responsibility for Miss Gaskell's actions?" he said.

"Then you haven't now?"

The man smiled a trifle dryly. "I, at least, respect your courage—or is it Miss Gaskell's?"

"I don't think I am especially charitable, and I'm sure I'm not vain, but your predecessor once told me I was the cleverest woman in this colony," said the little lady, reflectively. "That should entitle my opinion to some respect, and I have pleasure in telling you that I consider Mr. Weland an entirely innocent man."

"Time will show!" said the headman, and Mrs. Halifax passed on.

What Weland said to Millicent in the meanwhile is of no great importance, and he afterwards felt disgusted with himself as he remembered the puerility of most of his observations, but she happened to meet Thomas Ormond soon after she left him, and somewhat to that officer's astonishment detained him with a little imperious gesture.

"Tommy," she said, "I fancy you have been making a fool of yourself again."

"Well," said Tommy. "I admit that I sometimes do. Which particular folly are you alluding to?"

"The story you told Major Halifax and Langley."

"But it was all of it true."

"Is that any reason for telling it when it would lead people into thinking evil of your friend? That man saved your life for you."

"Of course! Still, you see, I am in the meanwhile a policeman and that implies an obligation. I wish it didn't. Anyway, you needn't blame me. It's all the fault of that horrible ass Langley. You'll excuse me, but he really is, you know."

Millicent smiled a little. "I believe he is. It is quite in the usual course that he is coming now."

Langley came up smiling with the glass in his eye. "I've been looking for you half the evening, Miss Gaskell," he said. "Now there are several interesting objects of African art here you haven't seen yet that I could show you. It's positively your duty to examine them. Everybody does, you know. You have a few minutes to spare?"

Millicent looked at him with cold, unfriendly eyes, while Tommy chuckled audibly. "I'm afraid I haven't," she said. "One would have fancied that it would have been evident. Mr. Ormond has something to tell me."

Langley, who let his eyeglass fall, retired with signs of disgust, and Tommy's grin expanded into a genial smile.

"I don't mind how you pitch into me after that. I couldn't have done it half so neatly myself," he said.

As it happened, Langley, whose temper was a trifle ruffled, met Weland in a corridor a little while later and stopped him with a sign.

"I can save you coming round to-morrow," he said. "You applied for permission to exploit the Arkana creek a little while ago?"

"I did," said Weland quietly.

"Then I have to inform you that permission will—ah—not be granted."

"May I ask why?"

Langley looked at him fixedly through the glass and assumed his slowest drawl, which, as Tommy Ormond now and then remarked, made any sensible man who heard it long to kick him.

"I fancy that in view of—ah—the circumstances, it would not be advisable for you to ask for reasons."

Weland said nothing, but feeling that he had already put a strain upon his temper which it might not bear much longer, was making his way out when he met Ormond in the verandah.

"I have just seen Langley, and I'm to do no trading up the creek," he said.

"You could have made a little out of it?" said Tommy.

"Two hundred pounds this year, any way. Still, it's not that exactly I'm worrying about."

Tommy nodded sympathetically. "Of course, I understand," he said. "Well, they'll find out what kind of fools they are by and by, and if they don't I'll have much pleasure in showing them."

XIV

UNDER OBLIGATION

"MISSY HALIFAX she no lib for home, sah," the dusky house boy said, and Weland smiled a trifle dryly as he glanced round the verandah.

The open book and piece of embroidery which lay on the little table seemed to indicate that the lady had, at least, been sitting there not very long ago, and it occurred to him that she could scarcely have failed to see him as he came up the hill, while he on his part had certainly noticed a figure in the shadow. The twinkling flash of steel among the trees below him, and a rhythmic tramp of feet, also showed that Major Halifax was occupied, and he was turning away when there was a rustle of draperies behind him, and swinging sharply round he saw Millicent in the doorway.

"I am going away at once, which is why I ventured to call at such an unseasonable hour," he said. "You will convey my excuses for doing so to Mrs. Halifax."

Millicent laughed softly. "If you are not in very great haste will you not sit down? What did the boy tell you?"

"That Mrs. Halifax did not live at home. I presume the message had the conventional English meaning."

"I believe it cost her a good deal of trouble to break him of the habit of telling everybody who called exactly where she was, and what she was doing, which it was not always advisable for them to know," she said. "As it happens, Mrs. Halifax is across at the Government House just now and will not be back until it is time for lunch. Is that any consolation to you?"

"As it implies that I shall not see her you could not expect me to admit it. Still, if you will respect my confidence, I think it is."

Millicent's eyes sparkled in a fashion that suggested she had a spice of temper.

"You can scarcely expect your friends to have faith in you unless you have a little in them. Now, one would have fancied you had sufficient proof of their goodwill that night at the Government House."

Weland sat silent a moment, while the girl watched him covertly with the faintest tinge of colour in her face.

"I think it is wisest to be candid with you and I was a trifle hurt, though I had, of course, no business to be," he said. "It is a lady's privilege to change her mind. On the night in question it was very evident that two of my friends believed in me, since they showed it very generously, but it seemed quite likely that they might have heard a good deal to my disadvantage in the meanwhile. That might have been sufficient to destroy their faith, you see."

"I expect we all feel a little bitter now and then," Millicent said. "Tommy told me that Langley had placed some vexatious restriction upon your business. I didn't quite understand what it was."

"It is vexatious enough," said Weland, seeing that she desired to change the subject. "There is a tribe of bushmen living up the Arkana Creek who don't get on very well with King Kwaka, but who have had to sell him all their produce because there was no other way of getting it to a market. Kwaka, as usual, got most of the profit. Now, it seemed to me that I could get

hold of the trade and make a good thing out of it, while the colony would also be the gainer, because the tribe, which is a strong one, hasn't been very friendly towards white men hitherto. It would have brought me in some two hundred pounds this year, and that means a good deal to me. I have been refused permission to negotiate with them. Still, there is no reason why I should trouble you with my grievances."

Millicent looked at him sharply. "I asked you to. It was, however, not the hampering of your trade you felt the most?"

Weland's face grew a trifle grim. "No," he said, "it was the implication. I go back a disgraced man—one who could not be trusted to have any dealings with a tribe of doubtful friendliness. I might sell them rifles, or stir them up to disaffection against the Government in order to make a profit by supplying them with powder. Everybody down here understands this perfectly. They do not, however, seem to remember that it is a remarkably difficult thing to bring rifles into Western Africa."

"So you are going back to Sapolto. It is—Tommy at least seems to think—a little dangerous up there just now."

"I am," said Weland. "I have my private account against Kwaka, and I owe the Company, which has paid me fairly well, a little."

"And you realize no other obligation? Tommy told me that the agent at Sapolto could do as much for the colony as a battalion of troops just now."

Weland slowly closed one hand. "I scarcely think the colony could expect him to. What has its Administration done for me beyond taking my good name away?"

He stopped with a curious abruptness, and Millicent saw the faint greyness that told of fierce anger in his cheeks.

"It hurts very much?" she said sympathetically.

Weland once more seemed to put a constraint upon himself. "Well," he said in a curiously quiet voice. "I think I told you I had my aspirations like most other men. They seemed beyond attainment, but presumption is necessary to a trader and becomes habitual with him, while I have once or twice contrived to bring about what was apparently impossible at Sapolto. Perhaps that made me unwisely daring, for the Administration has blighted my hopes somewhat effectively. I haven't even a character now."

Millicent said nothing for a while, though she realized his point of view and was vaguely gratified that he had adopted it.

"So you are going back bitter against the Administration!" she said. "I don't think that is very astonishing, but how will it affect what you mean to do? It seems to be generally admitted that your views have some weight with the black traders in the country round Sapolto."

Weland smiled somewhat grimly. "I shall not show my displeasure by breaking any of the laws of the colony, or inciting the discontented bushmen to mutiny, if that is what you mean."

"It isn't. I think you realize that as well as I do. You have only told me what you do not mean to do."

"I shall endeavour to attend to my own affairs and those of my employers and keep clear of unnecessary unpleasantness. Could you expect any more from me?"

"Yes," said the girl. "I think one could. You used to have the Imperial view."

There was more than a trace of bitterness in Weland's smile. "I am a discredited trader, and if I wanted to do anything generous—though I am by no means sure that I should—my hands are tied. When everybody spoke well of me, Langley and the rest of the Government men considered it presumption on my part to offer them a well-meant warning, and now it would be evident to

them that such a proceeding was only a cover for some fresh roguery. They must get out of the difficulty they will certainly have to face in their own way."

"I think," said Millicent, softly, "they have done you a grievous wrong, but still——"

Weland shook his head. "You don't quite grasp the point," he said. "What I can't forgive them is the fact that they have taken from me what I, perhaps, might have had."

"Well, we will let the obligation to the nation pass," she said. "There is, you admitted, one you owe your friends."

Weland met her eyes. "I will endeavour to bring no discredit upon them. I can, at least, promise to be passively well-behaved."

"And nothing more?"

"I'm afraid not. In fact, I scarcely think I should be allowed to be. Now, I have talked a good deal too much about my affairs, and I see my bearers coming up the hill. You will thank Mrs. Halifax on my account, though I am not sure I'm very sorry she was out this morning after all. It may be a very long while before I see you again."

Millicent went with him to the foot of the verandah stairway and held out her hand. "You will get over the bitterness," she said. "Then you will remember that we expect a good deal from you."

Weland looked down on her gravely a moment, then swung round abruptly and walked away. He swung himself into his travelling hammock, and Millicent watched the white-robed bearers as they plodded up the face of the hill until they grew faint and indistinct.

He was going back to the desolate factory disowned by those who had been glad to be counted as his friends, and broken in credit, and yet he had told her he might have forgiven the men who had brought this upon him. He had, however, said that they had also taken from him what he might have had, and, now there was no one to

notice it, a flush that was no longer pink but crimson crept into her cheek, but she brushed the thoughts away as Thomas Ormond came up the stairway.

"How long is it since Weland left?" he said.

"Twenty minutes."

Tommy sat down gasping. "Then it's evident I can't overtake him. I wonder if you could find me a piece of ice and some of the Major's claret?"

Millicent summoned the house boy and sent him for the claret. "You wanted to see Mr. Weland especially?" she said.

"I did," said Tommy. "The fact is he hasn't had exactly a pleasant time at the club, and there was a man who wouldn't sit down at the same table with him this morning. I don't know what he said, but it was evidently something nasty, for Weland got up and stopped the steward boy who was taking the other man's cover away. Everybody heard his answer.

"Put it out on the verandah," he said. "Kelton, you didn't go quite far enough. There isn't sufficient space for both of us in the room."

"Well?" said Millicent, quietly, remembering the little hard glint she had seen in Weland's eyes.

Tommy laughed. "Kelton blustered, but Weland kept on looking at him—and he went. To make it more pointed, Aminadab, the boy, took the tray out and put it on the verandah, and when he told Kelton his breakfast was ready everybody got up and laughed. Still, you see, they had to hold a House Committee on the affair and that is what I've come about."

"What did they do?"

Tommy closed one hand a trifle viciously. "What one would expect of Langley's friends," he said. "Sent him word by me that it would be better taste if he didn't come back. I told them I couldn't promise to remember a message like that. It's only a few weeks ago the man threw all his powder into the river to make sure that Kwaka shouldn't get hold of it."

"He did not tell me that."

Tommy grinned. "Is there any reason why he should."

"No," said Millicent, almost too hastily. "Of course not! Do you mean he purposely destroyed a good deal of powder that could have been sold?"

"Yes," said Tommy, who did not observe two hammocks being carried across the compound. "That is exactly what I do mean. Anyway, he poured it out into the river, though the bushmen were anxious to get it at about twice its value."

Now Millicent, who sat where her view of the compound was not so obstructed by a pillar as her companion's was, had seen the hammocks lowered and a little haggard gentleman alight from one of them, but she made no allusion to the fact.

"Then why didn't he sell the powder instead of throwing it away?" she asked.

"Why didn't he?" and Tommy, as she had expected, raised his voice impatiently. "You don't suppose Derrick Weland would coin money by letting Kwaka, who can't come out until he gets it, have powder to start a rebellion with! Now, of course, nobody expects the headman to know anything worth mentioning about what goes on in the bush. If he did he wouldn't be here. That's the way they manage in this colony. Besides, he only moves when Langley tells him, and everybody knows what Langley is. The fact is——"

Millicent smiled, and Tommy stopped abruptly.

"Good Lord—I've done it now!" he said.

Then he stood up, very stiffly, as a little haggard gentleman walked into the verandah with Langley behind him. He acknowledged Ormond's greeting with a dry smile.

"I hope I have not disturbed you, Miss Gaskell," he said. "The verandah is shadowy, and as I fancied I saw Major Halifax here I ventured to come in unannounced. It was, however, evidently Mr. Ormond I

noticed, and I could not avoid hearing a part of his conversation. With your permission I will sit down and ask him to proceed. Mr. Weland has been destroying powder ? ”

“ Yes, sir,” said Tommy. “ Of course, I didn’t know you were there.”

“ So I surmised ! ” said the headman, dryly. “ It was, however, his employers’ powder.”

“ Well,” said Tommy, who was still a trifle flushed in face, “ under the arrangement he has with them a big slice of the profit would have been his. Kwaka had sent down the bushmen to buy it in small lots for him, and they were offering ever so much more than it was worth. There’s no doubt that he threw away the powder, because I saw the empty kegs.”

The headman glanced at Langley, who stood fingering his eyeglass close by. “ I am a trifle astonished that nobody thought it worth while to inform me about that powder.”

Tommy smiled. “ I had, at least, the pleasure of mentioning it to Mr. Langley on two or three occasions.”

Langley said nothing, but he was not, from his appearance, especially pleased, and the headman sat silent a moment or two.

“ You really believe that trader Weland is capable of throwing away his employer’s money and his own share in the profit he could have made for no other reason than that he fancied the welfare of the colony demanded it ? ”

“ Yes,” said Tommy. “ I most certainly do.”

“ Of course,” and the headman smiled dryly, “ there is a certain likelihood of your confidence being a trifle misplaced. You expect Major Halifax soon, Miss Gaskell ? ”

Millicent said she scarcely thought she did, and Tommy grinned exultantly when the headman and the Commissioner took their leave.

XV

A TRIAL OF WITS

It was the hottest part of the afternoon and Weland lay in a canvas chair on the verandah at Sapolto contemplating the forest with half-closed eyes. A flotilla of canoes, which had just left the factory, were sliding up the dazzling river with wet paddles flashing, and Blower, who had been busy weighing and measuring the goods they brought down, was then whipping up a cocktail.

"Here's prosperity to the men who ride the bicycles, and rubber at five shillings the pound!" he said. "What we've weighed in this morning should count up close on a hundred and eighty pounds, and old Assalah hasn't taken a gin case out. That strip of frayed-out bunting has brought us a good deal in since we hoisted it."

Weland glanced up at the flag, which, faded as it was, flapped above them, a blur of glowing crimson. It had hung idly, wet with the heavy dews, beneath the moon as well as streamed out on the fitful breeze under the scorching sun, for of late canoes with paddles dipping softly stole past the factory at night, and though men haul down their flags when darkness comes Weland kept his flying for a sign to the bushmen. It was evident that they understood it, for those who had oil and rubber, gums and monkey skins, sent them down in haste, lest other men should seize them during the troubles they knew were coming. For that reason they took out nothing in exchange and trusted in the word of the lonely white man who had made that emblem fast above his factory.

"At least twice as much as we have ever handled in the same time since I came to Sapolto!" he said. "Still, I have made another little speculation. Headman Fernando has, it seems, made up his mind not to pay the Dutchmen what he owes them, and I bought up the

debt, when I stopped at their place coming up river. I gave them two hundred pounds for it."

Weland took a bundle of papers out of his pocket and flung them on the table. "They're quite straight—five hundred pounds worth. I'm going to get it. In fact, I'm starting for Fernando's place to-night."

Blower turned over the papers. "It's going to be risky. You are sure it's worth while?"

"Yes," said Weland, with a little grim smile. "I don't mean to stay here for ever, and I must have money when I go away, while I don't know any other way of making three hundred pounds quite as quickly."

"There's sense in that. Is there any reason for starting to-night?"

"Yes. I think it's a good one. From what Assalah told me Fernando has just got in a good lot of gum. It is scarcely likely he'll keep it by him long."

It was next evening when, having timed it so, they arrived at a big native village which much resembled Konnoto's, up a miry creek, and once more found a new stockade built and men with flintlock guns clustering about the huts. Nobody appeared especially pleased to see them, until they reached the headman's house, where the latter received them with a comprehensive smile of welcome and ordered a feast to be prepared.

Fernando was not much darker than yellow in colour, a little portly man of rather more than middle age, dressed in white cotton, with a somewhat deceptive twinkle in his eyes. He left the white men alone for a few minutes in a mud-floored room and Blower glanced at Weland dubiously.

"There are several points I don't like," he said. "It's quite evident he knew we were coming. Those fellows in the canoe must have seen us when we lay up in the little creek, and if there was any gum here he will have sent it away."

Weland smiled dryly. "The gum didn't come down river or we would have met the canoes. We know it was

here and it will be up the creek if it isn't here now. Fernando, I fancy, doesn't want any unpleasantness that can be avoided, but he means to keep us until to-morrow. Well, we'll show ourselves quite willing to stay?"

"What good will that do?"

"It will allow him to show us that he hasn't a pound of anything worth taking in his stores and then send the gum down river as fast as the boys can paddle."

"While we stay here!"

Weland laughed softly. "I expect by sunrise we'll be very close behind those canoes. Fernando has made a mistake. I'm not sure we could have got hold of a package of gum if he'd kept it in his stores."

There was no opportunity for further conversation because the headman came in just then, and an hour later a select company of big, muscular men, dressed in white cotton, though a few were almost naked, assembled in a great bare room.

Two or three of the guests sat at the table and the rest on the floor, and ate sardines and paste of anchovies with their fingers, between helpings from the standing dish of yellow oil, fish and fowl, spices and sweet potatoes, than which there are very few more palatable to the man accustomed to it made in any country. There were also many bottles and a calabash of palm wine, from which Blower appeared to drink freely. The meal was almost over before business was alluded to and Weland explained that he had bought their account against his host from the Dutchmen. Fernando did not, as he had half-expected, attempt to repudiate it.

"Those Dutchmen are great rogues and I do not think it would have been right of me to pay them," he said through a black interpreter, who described the gentlemen in question as "dam 'tief men." "One could walk quite straight when he had drunk two bottles of that gin, and the powder was worse. There was one of my people shot a bushman at no more than ten yards away and the broken pot fell off him."

"That should teach you that it would be very much wiser to trade with the Sapolto factory," said Weland. "Still, you had the goods, and if they were inferior you should have sent them back again."

"It is foolish talk. Can a man send back the gin he has drunk?" said the headman petulantly. "He does not like what is in one bottle and he opens another hoping to find it better. I have been badly used, but I would have been willing to pay you if there had been anything in my stores. I will show them you."

Blower flashed a swift glance at Weland and then shook his head. "When the headman tells us there is nothing we would not think of looking," he said. "Everybody knows how much Fernando's word is worth."

"I have told you there is nothing in the stores and there is nobody who dare disbelieve me here," he said. "When I get any gum or rubber in I will send it you, but just now the bushmen are very idle."

"They all seem to be shooting monkeys. Everybody is buying powder, but perhaps the monkeys are more cunning than usual, for I have seen very few skins. I noticed a good many of your boys had guns."

"It is the powder the white men sell us that is bad," Fernando said. "Still, what you kept at Sapolto was generally good, and I would make a special effort to get you some rubber if you would send me twenty kegs."

Blower grinned broadly across the table. "He has you there," he said.

Weland, however, as was usual with him when in a difficulty, took the boldest course. "The fact is, I would not care to sell my friends any powder just now because it might get them into trouble. I have, of course, heard the bushmen talking, and there are men who seem to think the Government will be afraid if they fire their guns. Now, no sensible headman would believe that, but if one gave his boys powder—to shoot monkeys

with—they might go off and join those foolish men.”

There was a sudden stillness and Fernando looked at the trader with a cunning smile.

“ You would not like your friends’ boys to do that ? ” he said.

Weland made a little deprecatory gesture. “ I would not like my friends to be hanged by the Government,” he said.

“ It is not wise to mention these subjects here, because it is a long way to the Government outpost and my people are not all as fond of white men as I am.”

Blower glanced at Weland significantly and then told humorous stories in a grotesque admixture of the coast palaver and bush idiom. He also told them exceedingly well and helped himself freely from the palm wine calabash meanwhile. Nobody can appreciate a pointed story better than the African, who is also seldom abstemious when it is not necessary, so amidst peals of laughter every man’s tongue became unloosed and Blower now and then found it difficult to obtain a hearing. He emphasized his stories by waving the calabash and splashing its contents upon his neighbours, until his speech grew disconnected and what he said was lost in the growing uproar.

The palm-oil chop had been served in a great brass bowl, and though it was by no means empty yet, the book-keeper clapped it upon his head. The company shouted with delight as the sticky yellow oil ran down his face and shoulders and his voice rose in dull reverberations from under the pot. He lurched into the table, and when he had dragged himself round it, headed, shuffling, for the doorway. Then there was a crash in the darkness as he apparently fell down the few steps to the verandah, and Fernando commanded four of his retainers to assist him to the hut set apart for the white men. Ten minutes later Weland found him sitting on the raised space of rammed mud which, with a few strips of matting, served as bed.

"I might have expected this when I brought you. The game is, of course, up now," he said.

"Then," said Blower, chuckling, "I must have done it very well."

Weland's astonishment was evident from his little abrupt movement. "I don't understand," he said.

"No?" said Blower, compassionately. "I always fancied you were not really clever. It's painstaking you are—a plodder. Now, you thought I was drunk, the headman thought I was drunk, which was more to the purpose, and so did everybody, but I wasn't."

"Then," said Weland, dryly, "you certainly ought to be."

Blower chuckled. "I went just far enough to do it artistically. The headman's quite sure you couldn't slip away to-night if you wanted to because you couldn't take me, and I've got the pot, you see."

"The pot?"

Blower laughed again. "The big brass one. I know a good thing when I see it. Remarkably fine specimen of native workmanship. Langley or Mrs. Halifax will give me five pounds for it."

"Well," said Weland dryly, "you have evidently a good deal more sense than I thought you had a little while ago. We'll slip out in two hours, but there's a difficulty. Fernando persisted that the Kroo boys would be more comfortable in a hut ashore, and he will certainly have put a man to watch them in the one in front of it."

"That's all right," said Blower. "Let him watch. They'll go out the back way—through the roof. I told Frypan to slip a matchet under his jacket. It's wise to take precautions when you stay with a man like Fernando."

An hour passed and then Weland became suddenly intent as an object that was a trifle more solid than the darkness behind it appeared in the opening. It had no definite shape, but he knew that a man was looking into

the room. For a space of seconds he felt the perspiration drip from him, and then the vague shadow vanished and there was nothing in the doorway. Blower sighed heavily.

"I could have got him with my boot," he said. "I'd have done it if he'd stayed another moment."

They waited another hour and then, moving very softly, slipped out of the hut. There was not a sound to break the stillness, and Weland, who stood listening a moment, touched Bower's arm.

"Go round and see if the boys have got out. If we went together it would double the risk," he said. "I'll wait just beyond the big hut."

Several minutes passed very slowly and then Weland heard a patter of footsteps that sounded horribly distinct and a dim shadow moved out of the gloom. Weland stood still until Blower came up beside him.

"They've got out," he said.

Then they moved forward softly until Blower stopped in front of a little hut which stood by itself almost in the forest and not far from the river.

Weland seized his arm. "Come on," he said. "It's the Ju-Ju house."

Blower seem to chuckle and shook off his grasp. "Exactly!" he said. "Now you wait two minutes and I'll astonish you."

"I'd sooner make a start down river," said Weland dryly. "I never heard of anybody gaining much by provoking the Ju-Ju men unnecessarily."

"There's a good deal you don't know," said Blower. "Stop there and I'll prove it to you."

Blower went into the little hut, and Weland, who strove to hold his impatience in check, heard him strike a match.

The night was growing a trifle clearer as the moon rose higher above the forest and Weland drew further back into the deeper shadow. He had scarcely done so when he heard the soft fall of a naked foot and a man slipped

out of the gloom between him and the hut. He seemed to be almost naked and was clearly moving towards the little edifice. Weland set his lips as he wondered what to do.

He could not hope to creep up unobserved behind a man born in the bush, who, it was evident, could rouse the village with a cry, nor could he warn Blower without bringing about the same result. Still, what could not be done in the open might be accomplished in the hut, where the sound of the scuffle would be deadened, and he felt his heart throbbing as he moved towards it behind the man, who stopped a moment in the doorway and then went in.

"I've got it," a voice came out of the shadowy interior. "Now—what the devil——"

There was a crash and a thud, and next moment Weland sprang in through the opening. He tripped over something that felt soft beneath his feet and reeled into the wall. Then it became evident that a struggle was going on, for there was a rustling and writhing on the floor, and stooping down he groped with his hand until he felt what seemed to be a human head.

"Keep off! That's me," a half-articulate voice said.

There was a renewed scuffling, a smothered objurgation, and Weland fumbled for a match. One slipped from his fingers, but he contrived to light the next, and the pale flame showed Blower, with hair dishevelled and raiment torn, lying upon a naked man whom he held by the throat. The match was, as it happened, made of wax and burned long enough for Weland to see that the Ju-Ju man had passed his prime and was apparently willing to abandon the struggle.

"Can you hold him until I get my jacket off?" he said.

"Yes," gasped Blower. "Keep still or you'll be sorry!"

Weland tore off his jacket and his suspenders next. Then he felt for the victim's head and rolled the garment

about it as best he could. He fastened it round the neck with one piece of the suspenders and made shift to lash the man's hands with the rest. Then he dragged Blower to his feet.

"He'll wriggle loose in two or three minutes. We haven't a second to lose," he said.

"Strike another match," said Blower.

Weland did it, and Blower, who picked up an object from the floor, threw it into the big brass pot.

"I've got it and now we'll go," he said.

They were outside in another moment and running towards the river bank, where three or four shadowy figures seemed to materialize out of the mist.

"No 'team, sah," said Frypan, the Kroo. "Too much dam bushman lib in two canoe."

"We'll let the current slide her down until we can break the fire," he said.

They crept on board the launch without a sound, slipped the moorings and poled her out into the stream, which bore her away into the soft darkness. The canoes faded astern, the forest that slid by shut the village in, and while Frypan and a comrade stood forward with a pole, Weland broke up the banked fire.

"It's just as well none of Fernando's boys know anything about engines," he said. "Give me the oil, Blower. We must raise a blaze."

Blower did as he was bidden, a gush of flame poured from the funnel, and by and by there was a faint simmering of steam. It grew louder and at last when Weland opened the valve the little engine thudded and the propeller languidly splashed round. He turned and looked astern but still no sound came out of the darkness that shrouded the river.

XVI

BLOWER MAKES A BARGAIN

"I HAVEN'T told you my opinion of that last piece of gratuitous folly yet," Weland said, as the launch made way rapidly.

Blower chuckled and took up his jacket, which lay in the brass pot. "Then you can wait until I show you what I've got," he said.

He unrolled the jacket and displayed a little, very rudely-fashioned caricature of a human figure about eighteen inches long. It was apparently made of coarse pottery and was wholly devoid of beauty, but there was a dull gleam in the middle of the crudely-modelled forehead.

"Fernando's Ju-Ju!" said Weland, with a little gasp of astonishment.

Blower contemplated the somewhat repulsive object affectionately. "I'm afraid I've left one of his legs behind. They should have made him of wood," he said. "Still, there's enough of him left to suit our purposes."

"It seems to me there's a good deal too much," said Weland, grimly. "We'll have a swarm of Fernando's boys coming down to ask what we've done with him. Have you taken leave of your senses altogether?"

Blower laughed softly. "No," he said, "I don't think I have. It was an inspiration. Nobody could call him pretty, but he's famous. Fernando's Ju-Ju men couldn't get on without him."

"Still, they wouldn't find it very difficult to make another."

Blower pointed to the faintly gleaming object in the Ju-Ju's forehead. "They couldn't make an agгри, and that one's about the finest in the country," he said. "Nobody could—they've tried it in England. Just now they could hardly buy one either."

"They would be scarcely likely to worry about trying when they have only to send the boys down with flintlocks to get it back for nothing."

Blower shook his head compassionately. "I don't know how you ever came to be made agent at Salpoto," he said. "Can't you understand yet that we've only got to keep him until Fernando pays up?"

"The point you don't seem to grasp is the difficulty we would have in doing it."

Blower chuckled. "You don't suppose the Ju-Ju men would tell the bushmen the thing had gone? They have some sense, any way, and wouldn't have much confidence in a god who would let anybody knock his legs off and run away with him. Of course, some of the Ju-Ju are not thought much of, but every bushman between here and Arkana is afraid of this one. Now, it's commencing to dawn on you?"

Weland leaned upon the tiller and laughed heartily. "You are a clever rascal, and I believe you're right," he said. "Still, I'm not sure that Fernando has faith enough in the thing himself to part with much of his property to get it back."

"I fancy the Ju-Ju men would make him, whether he has or not," said Blower, dryly. "In this country the king has to back the priesthood up or it is usually much the worse for him. In the meanwhile we'll pick up the canoes as well. There's nothing like making sure of a thing."

It was two or three hours later and Weland was sitting drowsily at the helm when a faint thudding sound stole out of the darkness in front of them. Leaving the helm a moment, he shut off part of the steam and the clanking of the engine and whirr of the propeller sank to a lower pitch.

The gurgle of water at the bows died away and there was only a soft whirring as the launch slid on into the thin white mist which now streaked the river, but the rhythmic thud and splash in front of them was growing

louder and Weland felt his fingers quiver a little on the helm.

Suddenly a cry arose in the darkness. Then the beat of paddles swelled into a sharp staccato and a hoarse shouting came out of the mist.

"Give her all the steam," said Weland.

Blower leaned forward and turned a wheel. The little engine throbbed and clanked, the gurgle at the bows commenced again, and the launch shivered and rattled through all her length. Flame gushed from her funnel as Frypan, who came scrambling aft, flung oil into the furnace, and she lifted her nose a trifle as she swept away with propeller whirring and a smother of froth lapping about her stern.

"Stir her up!" said Blower, groping for the big oil can. "If we can't do it any other way we'll fling in some gin. They may crawl up a creek at any minute."

Flame still streamed from the funnel, there was a roar of blown-off steam, and Blower recklessly slid another weight upon the lifting valve. Faster flashed the little cranks, beam, and knee, and skin-plank creaked and groaned, and the froth ran white to the rail as the craft buried herself aft in the flung-off river. The dawn was coming and it breaks suddenly in that country. Then one of the Kroo boys shouted, and turning his head sharply Weland saw the canoes, two dim shadows that moved in a smear of mist and were chiefly visible by the froth that whirled about them as the paddles splashed.

"We have them!" he said. "Open the whistle."

A shrill scream rang across the forest, the canoes sprang into visibility, the thud of paddles suddenly died away, and there was a splashing in the river as the launch drew level with the rearmost craft. In another few moments she came up with the other, trembling all through, with propeller whirring astern, and the growing light showed that the dim river was sprinkled with woolly heads. Then she stopped altogether, and a roar of blown-off steam rang through the stillness of the dawn.

Neither of the white men spoke for a minute, and Weland, leaning on the tiller, watched two or three of the negroes crawl out amidst the undergrowth and plunge into the forest.

"Let her make a turn or two and I'll put you alongside this one," he said.

The little engine clanked for a few moments and then stopped again when a big dug-out craft with a thatched roof over part of it lay beneath the rail. Blower and Frypan sprang down and crawled under the thatch where Weland could hear them apparently dragging packages about. It was some minutes before they came out and climbed back on board the launch.

"There's some rubber and a good deal of gum," said Blower. "If there's as much in the other one it should wipe off a good slice of Fernando's debt."

They backed the launch up stream to the other canoe, lashed them together and took them in tow, while when they went on again Weland laughed.

"Fernando will have a bad attack of temper when he hears what we've done," he said. "I've no doubt that with a little persuasion from the Ju-Ju men we'll get the rest of the debt out of him."

They safely reached Sapolto, where the value of every lump of horribly-smelling rubber and fibre package of gum was scrupulously credited to the headman, for Blower was a precisian in all that concerned his profession. Then they waited several days for the Ju-Ju men to commence the overtures, and Blower grew a trifle short in temper when they made none.

The fourth evening succeeded a day of almost intolerable heat and a solid wall of blackness seemed to shut the factory in. Weland lay huddled in a canvas chair with a cigar that had gone out in his hand, while Blower gasped heavily as he scribbled in the book he held. At last he flung it from him and turned to his comrade.

"I can't see and I can't think. Nobody could to-night," he said. "Now, I wonder what in the name of

everything that has a little sense in it we're stopping here for. Why can't we go down river to-morrow and leave this forlorn place before we die in it? There's quite a little pile to your credit and I've saved most of my salary. I could have nervous breakdown—I feel like it—and you've got fever. We'd go home in the mail boat with a doctor's certificate."

"Then why don't you go? I'll have pleasure in certifying that you're no use to anybody."

Blower grinned at this, for one has to make allowances for the effects of the climate in that country. "I'll start to-morrow if you'll come," he said. "What is to stop you?"

Weland was in a black mood that evening, and felt almost inclined to admit that he did not know of any obstacle. He had come back from the seaboard settlement an embittered man, with the hopes which had of late grown more and more alluring suddenly dissipated.

He was under a cloud. Men who made no great pretence of virtue or public spirit avoided him, and a stain that the most hardened would scarcely care to bear in lands where the white man rules the black one had been cast upon his name.

"I don't know that there is anything," he said dryly. "Still, I think I'll stay. Nobody will appreciate it, and it's quite likely that if we have any trouble with the bushmen Langley will send up and arrest me. Admitting that, I wouldn't like to clear out and let Kwaka have it quite all his own way."

Blower nodded. "Of course!" he said. "It's condemned folly, but I know the feeling. Well, I'll stay while you do, but the sooner the trouble's over the better pleased I'll be." A blaze of blue lightning forced up the forest out of the darkness, which, it seemed, snapped together upon it again. Weland's eyes were a trifle dazzled and in the dead stillness a floor board creaked. Then Blower rose with disconcerting abruptness and looked at his comrade.

"Will you pass me that jug across? I've got the crawls to-night," he said.

"Sit down!" said Weland, sharply, for he was sensible of a curious little thrill of apprehension.

Blower, still standing, turned his head swiftly towards the door. "I think I'll wait a moment," he said. "I heard it again—it's closer now!"

"Take a drink," said Weland, savagely. "You're getting a little too much for me."

Blower dropped somewhat limply into his chair. "It's all right," he said. "He's there—in the room—behind you!"

Weland swung round and saw an almost naked negro standing scarcely a yard away from him.

"What brought you here?" he said sharply, though there was a just perceptible tremor in his voice.

The man pointed to the tatooing upon his breast. "You have something that belongs to us," he said.

Blower, who seemed to have regained his serenity, walked up to the stranger and quietly inspected him.

"He's only a half-grown one by the pattern on him," he said. "Now that nonsense will not go down with us and if you try any more of it you'll get hurt. Sit down and take a drink like an ordinary man."

He dragged the negro, who made no show of resistance, and probably did not understand him, towards the table, though Weland fancied that he chiefly desired to reassure himself. The man, who was young, however, made no demur when the jug was handed him, and there was apparently very little in it when he laid it down. Then the tension both white men had certainly felt relaxed.

"I have come for something which belongs to us," he said again.

"Ask him if he expects to get it for nothing," said Blower to Weland, who spoke the bush idiom better than he did.

Weland put the question and the man made a little

gesture of warning. "It will bring disaster upon you if you keep it here."

"I think you had better tell him we're not quite sure of that," said Blower, grinning. "We broke one of his legs off and he didn't seem to mind. In fact, as he seemed to have so little respect for himself we were thinking of pulling the other off and picking the thing out of his forehead and selling it. If that stirs him up too much we will let you have him back."

"Then you want something for what you have taken," he said. "It is worth very little to you."

Weland glanced at Blower, who nodded. "Tell him that when the headman sends down gum or rubber to square up the rest of his debt he shall have the thing."

"I have not the power to offer so much, but I will go back and give your message to those who sent me," he said. "It may be they will agree. I do not know, but if you tell this story to any black man disaster will certainly overtake you. If the gum and rubber is sent down you will put what you have taken in a gin case and give it to the man who will ask you for it."

He turned away, and Blower, who went with him down the stairway, appeared thoughtful when he came back.

"I fancied it would be better to make sure he had left the place—and he didn't melt," he said. "He walked like anybody else. I don't know how he got in, though he might have crawled in by a window into the next room, but the door there creaks when you open it. Anyway, I think he's right. They're not nice people to meddle with, and until the canoes come down I'll sleep with the thing beneath my pillow."

He did so for a week, or at least he told Weland he did, though the latter admitted that he lay awake most of every night with a pistol to keep him company, and then one morning several canoes came sliding down river. Blower was busy for two or three hours weighing and measuring their contents, and then came up the verandah stairway smiling.

"It's all right. We're about five pounds to the good and you can let them have the thing," he said.

XVII

A DIFFICULT SITUATION

THERE was no doubt that Leslie Ormond had timed his visit to the native village inopportunistically, and his comrade, at least, was wondering how he could retire from a situation that was rapidly becoming unpleasant without sacrificing his dignity. The Rev. Hammond Joynson was not fond of strife, and his anxieties were increased by the fact that he had his wife with him, but he remembered what was expected from a man of his profession and that he had more than his own prestige to maintain. It was also evident that he must face the difficulty alone, for Leslie Ormond did not appear to realize that there was any necessity for getting away at all. He stood as though half-dazed leaning against a big cottonwood that flung a strip of shadow across the glaring sand, with a great weariness in his haggard face, which was flushed with fever.

That native village stands on a little island near the mouth of the muddy Arkana Creek, and is about as unhealthy and generally undesirable a place for a white man to visit as could be found in Western Africa.

A trimly painted canoe with awnings lay alongside the bank, and a burly white man with straw-coloured hair and a puffy, sensual face of Teutonic type sat upon a gin case beside the headman, who was almost naked, though Ormond had hitherto always seen him dressed with at least comparative decency. He was an elderly man and very fat, with twinkling eyes, and there were a good many bottles scattered about him. Behind him crouched and squatted a number of his people with next to nothing on. A few more lay, apparently very sick, in the

sand, and it was evident that a debauch was just commencing. Joynson sat upon a bundle of cloth beside his wife, with two of the Mission boys, who did not appear at ease, behind him, and, seeing that Ormond made no move, he turned to the headman.

"We have another village to call at and one is apt to catch fever by travelling at night," he said in a passable attempt at the bush idiom. "With your permission we will go now, and, perhaps, come back again next week."

"Must you go so soon? I wouldn't like to think I'd driven you away," said the trader on the gin case, grinning.

Joynson, disregarding him, glanced at Ormond deprecatingly. "I fancy it would be advisable. They are not in a condition to listen to us to-day, Brother Leslie."

The latter fact was tolerably evident, but Ormond made no answer.

The headman, however, was ready with his tongue, and he laughed. "It will not be dark for a long while yet and I was hoping you would stay and talk to me," he said. "I have a boy here, who has been at a mission and has since run away from several factories, you could argue with. He knows a good deal about the white man and says they do not believe in what you teach us. Now, I am not sure that I do, though I have listened to a good many missionaries, but I am not prejudiced."

Joynson glanced at Ormond, who had apparently roused himself at last. "It wouldn't be the least use," he said. "He is by no means sober now and the rest may break out at any moment. There is a season for everything."

Ormond nodded sadly. "We will go," he said. "They know no better—the white man will answer for it."

"You know your own affairs best, but an outsider might wonder whether you were wise in backing out," the trader said. "You see, these besotted niggers fancy

a white man is afraid of nothing, and we unscrupulous traders find it advisable to keep up the delusion. We have, however, the prestige of the Company which pays us to maintain, and that responsibility is not put on you."

Joynson, of course, saw the inference, and his face grew red, but he held his head up and somewhat inadvisedly flung an apposite text at the trader, who forthwith translated it for the headman's benefit. The latter stood up and glanced at the missionary reproachfully.

"What have I done that I should be called a pig?" he said. "I have, at least, been kind to a good many missionaries, and when they came here most of them brought something for me."

Joynson knew that this was true, and he had usually observed the customs of the country, but he was also, when pushed too far, an obstinate man, and when he bestowed his goods upon the heathen he at least expected a hearing.

"Take up those cloth pieces and carry them to the canoe," he said to the Mission boys.

The headman, however, raised his hand and pointed vaguely round the assembly.

"I think that is not kind," he said. "I am the white man's brother. I know it because he has often told me so, and these people are his brothers too. Now, what is the use of having a brother when he will give you nothing, while the white men have so much and we have so little? The traders do not pretend to be kind men, but this one has brought me several cases of gin."

The trader chuckled. "I think he has you there," he said.

Joynson, who once more disregarded him, turned to the headman. "We will," he said, "bring you something very nice the next time we come."

He gave his wife his arm, and, though he was never sure whether the trader or the headman instigated it, or whether it was due to the cupidity of the negroes who

saw the cloth and petty sundries they had expected a share of being carried away, most of them got up just then and swarmed about the little party, clamouring excitedly and snatching at the Mission boys' burdens.

"I think you had better humour them," said the trader. "It appears as if you would have a little difficulty in getting away. They are, however, fond of music, and as you don't seem inclined to preach it might please them if you would sing. There is a man here who will beat the drum."

He repeated the suggestion in the bush tongue and there was an outbreak of laughter and approbation, while Joynson swung round very red in face. Ormond, however, touched his arm.

"A little derision will not hurt us," he said. "Go on with Mrs. Joynson as unconcernedly as you can."

Then he turned and moved fearlessly towards the thickest of the crowd, which gave back before him, and stopping close in front of the trader swung up his hand. His observations served two purposes, for his resonant voice and lean, commanding figure seized the negroes' attention, and Joynson might have reached the canoe without further difficulty had not a big naked bushman clutched the little brooch at the neck of his wife's dress.

The haggard woman stood very still, with apprehension in her eyes, gazing at the brutish face and quivering under the touch of the greasy hands, while Joynson seized the negro's arm, when there was a murmur from the jostling mob, which opened up suddenly as a white man sprang through the midst of it. Next moment the negro reeled backwards with bleeding face, staggered, and turning partly round was met by a kick where it evidently hurt him. He blinked at the white man stupidly, and then apparently realizing that the latter's rancour was not exhausted yet, ran for his life. Mrs. Joynson gasped and held out her hand as Blower, who touched his big sun hat, turned towards her grinning.

"Get into your canoe, madam, and wait for us in the

stream," he said. "Weland's here and we'll undertake the after meeting."

Mrs. Joynson glanced over her shoulder when Ormond joined them and saw Blower stride truculently up to their white persecutor, who had just then a big meerschaum pipe in his hand. Blower whipped it away from him and rapped the bowl off on the gin case.

"If you're not pleased at that you can get up, you Teutonic porker, and I'll endeavour to teach you manners."

The little lady was, however, by no means quite so pained as might have been expected, and felt she could have forgiven him a good deal just then, while she was almost sorry she did not see what happened next because the Mission boys wasted no time in pushing off the canoe. They rested on their paddles when they had driven the craft out into the stream and she glanced towards the island. The negroes had clustered about the headman and the buzzing of their voices rose continually, while though what they said was not audible most of them appeared to be laughing uproariously. The African, as Joynson remembered, is singularly unstable.

"I almost fancy Schreider is not exactly happy now," he said. "Mr. Blower, I know, does not like him—they have had business disputes—and he is apt to be somewhat violent when he is angry."

"What are they doing now?" Mrs. Joynson asked.

A launch swept out from under the opposite side of the island and steamed more slowly past the canoe alongside the bank. A Kroo boy leaned out and seized it, then the launch swung out into the stream and Weland sprang down into the canoe the Kroo boy held alongside of her. He had hurled a good many little kegs into the river when a white man appeared on the bank with a cluster of negroes behind him, waving his arms and evidently declaiming furiously.

"I fancy that Mr. Weland is throwing Schreider's powder in," said Joynson, with a little dry smile.

"Though I do not know that such an action is entirely warranted, they are, of course, better without the powder, and I am not disposed to censure him. That is even better! There go the gin cases now!"

Two or three green cases came sliding down the stream and Joynson did not observe that the Mission boys glanced at them longingly when they drifted by almost within arm's length of the canoe. In the meanwhile the white man on the bank was making furious gestures, and Mrs. Joynson turned to her husband.

"I think he is endeavouring to persuade them to go off and attack the launch," she said. "He seems very angry indeed."

Blower stood up on the launch's side deck with Frypan crouching behind him, and the trader opposite him on the bank, while the appearance of the latter was not prepossessing. He was hatless, his jacket was rent, and there was apparently a good deal of sand sticking about him in a fashion which suggested that he had rolled in it.

"Schreider is really a disgusting man," she said.

Joynson nodded. "He certainly is," he said. "One could almost excuse a little acerbity on the part of Mr. Blower. Still, I think he means to disregard him."

As it happened, Blower had no intentions of the kind, for when the launch suddenly went ahead and slid in towards the bank he hurled a large and apparently heavy object in the direction of the man who was reviling him. The latter sprang backwards in time, but the next thing Blower threw reached its mark in the region of the trader's belt, and there was a shout of laughter from the negroes when he sat down suddenly upon the bank. Then the canoe was let go, and as it slid in towards the sand the launch swung round and steamed slowly towards the Mission craft. Weland stopped the engines close alongside and took off his hat.

"If you are going down to Opponotax and will come on board I can shorten the journey for you," he said.

The rest were glad to do so, and when they went on

down stream with the canoe made fast astern, Ormond, who sat limply in a corner of the cockpit, looked up.

"You arrived at a propitious time, Mr. Weland," he said. "I fancy you have saved us a good deal of unpleasantness."

"I," said Mrs. Joynson, "am quite sure of it."

"And we are very thankful," said Joynson. "You threw all the gin in?"

"Every case, I fancy. I smashed the two or three I found ashore."

"Then you have done the Mission a very great service," said Ormond.

Weland smiled. "To be quite candid, I never considered it from that point of view. You see, the success of your efforts is a matter of indifference to me, and it was the uneasiness two friends of mine might be occasioned that concerned me. Besides, Schreider once treated me rather badly over a bargain, and I felt there was an obligation on me to show him that such proceedings are risky, while it's advisable never to let slip an opportunity of making the bushmen understand that they can't insult white folks."

Mrs. Joynson looked at him with a smile in her eyes. "Had you any right to throw his powder in?"

"As a matter of fact, I scarcely think I had."

"Then couldn't Schreider get you into trouble?"

"He might lodge a complaint at the Government outpost, but it's scarcely likely. This creek is proscribed to the traders and the village is certainly situated in it, while as I have been especially forbidden to take goods in, it did not seem reasonable to me that Schreider should make a big profit on his powder. When I have to defer to the whims and fancies of our most impractical Administration I intend to make sure my competitors do so equally. Now you have my motives."

Ormond looked up. "You seem to doubt the wisdom of the Administration in keeping that creek closed to trade," he said. "Surely you cannot think it wrong

to shut the gin case out of one narrow strip of forest ? ”

Weland smiled a trifle grimly. “ I do not ask you whether you are wise in removing the one restraint that the fear of the Ju-Ju puts upon the negro before he is capable of realizing what moral responsibility is,” he said. “ It is not my business, though I have seen the results of it.”

Joynson turned towards his comrade somewhat hastily.

“ I really think it would be wiser not to worry about those points just now,” he said. “ You have the fever rather badly.”

Weland felt in his pocket and took out a little flask and a letter. “ I have here one of the best prescriptions for checking it that was ever mixed,” he said. “ Still, there’s whisky in it.”

Ormond shook his head. “ I thank you, but I cannot take it,” he said with a little smile. “ One has, at least, to be consistent.”

“ The objection doesn’t apply to the letter. It had almost slipped my memory, though it brought me into the creek after you. Tommy Ormond, who had gone down river, asked me to hand it you.”

Ormond opened the envelope and read its contents with hazy eyes, while Weland noticed that his fingers tightened upon the paper. Then his face grew very grim as well as weary and he huddled himself closer upon the matting.

“ I think if you will excuse me I’ll try to sleep. My head aches almost intolerably.”

XVIII

ORMOND GOES DOWN RIVER

Two days had passed since his visit to the native village, and Leslie Ormond lay in a darkened room of the Opp-

notax Mission with the letter Weland had given him in his hand.

It informed him that the inquiries he had desired to be made in Australia concerning the woman he had married had practically established the fact that she had died there two years earlier. There was, the lawyer said, evidence enough in his opinion to warrant the assumption that the late Mrs. Ormond had been buried under another name at such a time and place, and he expected no difficulty in obtaining legal confirmation of this view, in case there was any property in question. Still, there was, he pointed out, one circumstance which, though he scarcely thought any one could make much of it, might cast a very faint doubt upon the dead woman's identity.

Ormond smiled wearily and laid down the letter, for it was just that trifling uncertainty which had embittered his life during the last two years. His marriage had been a blunder, as he had realized even before the woman left him within a few months of it, and he admitted the fact unreservedly to himself when he met Millicent Gaskell after he heard that she had died abroad.

He was a man of strong passions sternly held in check, and fancied he recognized in what had befallen him already no more than the just reward of allowing anything to distract him from the task he had undertaken, but nature would not be subdued, and for two long years he had fought a weary battle with himself.

It was a relief when Joynson led a negro in. The man was evidently weary, and there was a clotted bandage about one naked thigh as well as a festering scar upon his side. He had come down for the white man to heal his wounds, he said, and to escape the vengeance of his headman. There had, it appeared, been an affray between the latter's retainers and the men of a bush village who objected to paying the tax upon their huts, out of which the headman, in all probability, made a handsome profit.

"I do not know if that tax is necessary. It is not

for me to decide, but the fashion in which it is collected is an iniquity," he said.

Joynson nodded. "I'm afraid it is," he said. "The headmen make it an excuse for unlimited extortion and probably pay the Government about half they are entitled to. The worst is that in the bushmen's present unsettled state it is very likely to drive them to mutiny."

Ormond looked up with eyes that burned with fever. "It must be prevented. Too much blood has been poured out already," he said. "The Administration shall at least hear the truth for once. I will go down and warn them. Their officers are afraid."

"I'm not sure you would be listened to," said Joynson. "Still, you can't go down river with the fever on you."

He stopped abruptly, noticing the trace of impatience in his companion's face, and there was a tramp of feet in the compound below.

"Those are not bushmen," said Leslie.

Joynson appeared thoughtful. "I believe it is Lieutenant Ormond, and he and his men will, of course, want something to eat," he said. "I wonder if they would like a little of that barrelled beef. It is still, considering everything, by no means bad, and, as you may have noticed, we have very little canned goods left."

He was apparently still considering the question as he went down the stairway, for Leslie sitting in the darkened room heard Tommy Ormond laugh. Then the latter's voice came up clearly and decisively.

"No thanks!" he said. "Not if it's out of the same cask. You see, they're fastidious rascals. The other man spoiled them. Very good of you, but don't you worry. I'll screw something out of the headman we're calling upon. Two or three of the nicest cans you have will do for me."

Then he came up the stairway, as usual two steps at a time, and sat down on Leslie's bed.

"If the Rev. Hammond had been in England he'd have got himself into trouble for keeping steamboat beef that's distinctly unfit for human consumption," he said. "I was passing this way and looked in to see if you had got the letter I gave Weland for you. If you'll excuse me mentioning it, I fancied you'd be anxious to have it. I recognized the embossing on the envelope. No bad news, I hope—she's not alive after all? Now, of course, I might have expressed that differently, but you know what I mean."

Leslie handed him the letter, and Tommy sat silent a minute or two. "Well," he said reflectively, "it's your duty to believe that what happens is for the best, though I occasionally find it difficult myself; and now you have positive proof that she is dead. I felt sorry for her once or twice."

"No," said Leslie, "I don't think I have. There is very little in the letter that I was not aware of already."

Tommy looked at him in astonishment. "This fellow tells you the law would give you permission to assume it!"

"Still, that is not quite decisive."

Tommy noticed the tension in his voice and again sat silent a space. "I'm going to take a liberty. What made you marry her?" he said. "I don't mind your not giving me an answer."

"Why were you sorry for her?"

"Well," said Tommy, "I don't think you were ever very fond of her and she felt it. As a matter of fact, you shouldn't have married anybody. We are relations and I'm privileged, you see."

Leslie smiled a trifle wearily. "There is, perhaps, a little truth in what you have said, but there are matters beyond your comprehension, Tommy, and we'll change the subject. I'm going down river to warn the Government people of the probable effect of the hut tax troubles."

"You're not fit, for one thing, and they wouldn't

listen, for another. Let them alone. It will all help to bring Kwaka out, and then, I hope, we'll smash him and be done with it."

"And the bloodshed?"

"It will have a salutary effect," said Tommy, grimly. "Anyway, you can't help it. You'll probably die if you make the journey with your temperature at what it evidently is, and if you didn't you wouldn't do the least good. Stop here and get well. It's not you and I but the Administration that is responsible."

"Still, I shall start to-morrow."

Tommy shook his head. "Then, if you can't rest until you're a martyr I believe it would be as quick a way as any other, and it never was any use arguing with you," he said. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll look round and see what the Rev. Hammond is getting me for lunch."

He left the mission shortly afterwards and it was early next morning when Leslie Ormond was carried down to the canoe. He smiled at his comrade's protests; the boys dipped the paddles, and the craft slid away into the thin white haze which veiled the river. This, however, ascended and melted, a strip of water by the bank shone dazzlingly and grew wider as the sun swung up above the cottonwoods, until the yellow stream flung back the pitiless brilliancy like a burnished mirror. No awnings could keep it out and Ormond lay on a strip of matting racked with pain, while the heat increased and the steam of leagues of forest, losing its visibility now, permeated the heavy, stagnant air.

At last the scorching afternoon dragged away and the thick, hot darkness came, but though the mists rose from the river and crept in white folds about the canoe there was no stopping. One boy crouched by the steering paddle while his comrades slept in turn, and the canoe slid always on.

Then a fire was lighted on the stone hearth as the sun sprang up and another pitiless day began, while the

negroes clamoured and squabbled over their morning meal, for Ormond lay still and watched them with vacant eyes and no reproaches on his tongue. He strove to eat a morsel and then lay the round of the clock again, blinking at the leagues of watery jungles that rolled behind them, until they slid into the blue smoke that drifted out from a mud-built village as dusk was closing down. Here the hammock was put ashore and bearers hired, and after a few hours' delay the journey commenced again. There was no moon, but the trail was beaten hard and Commissioner Langley had made it plain that all who kept the law might travel that way at any hour without fear of molestation. He had also done it effectively, though it implied the necessity of hanging several bushmen.

It was about eight o'clock on the next night when the headman, who had just finished his dinner, sat with Commissioner Langley in a big, cool, stone-built room. No lamps were lighted, for the place was already more than sufficiently hot, and the headman, who had just shaken off the fever which prostrated him with an unpleasant regularity, did not desire to let the land breeze in. Thus the only warning they had of the dusky servant's approach was a soft patter of naked feet, until the man himself appeared suddenly within the sweep of light.

"White man lib, sah," he said. "Say he done come from Opponotax."

The headman laid down his cigar with a gesture that was rather expressive of resignation than pleasure. "The Rev. Leslie Ormond!" he said. "I wish it wasn't. I have in times past borne a good deal from him. Still, I suppose I'll have to see him."

A minute or two later Ormond entered the strip of light and stood still blinking at them. His face was awry as though with pain or weariness and his eyes half-closed, while Langley laid down the glass he held as he gazed at him.

"I think the reverend gentleman is not—ah—feeling very well," he said. "If I might venture to suggest it, we could hear him to-morrow and in the meanwhile ask Surgeon Chester to see what he can do for him."

"What I have to tell you must be heard to-night," he said.

"Will you sit down?" said the headman. "A glass of wine?"

The dusky servant drew out a chair, and Ormond, who did not seem to see it clearly, and thrust the proffered glass aside, rather fell into than sat in it.

"I will be concise, because I do not know how long my strength may last," he said. "The tax you have laid upon the bushmen is leading to bloodshed."

Langley shook his head. "You are a trifle behind the fact," he said. "They have already shot one or two of the men who asked them for it."

"That was individual murder, for which I think the men who induced the Administration to sanction the iniquitous system are in some degree accountable. There will, however, be a general outbreak unless you make a change. I have to tell you that a village on the Arkana creek was attacked and defended so fiercely that three men were killed."

The headman glanced at him sharply. "You are sure of this?"

"I had the story from a wounded fugitive."

"You, of course, acquainted Lieutenant Ormond with the fact?"

"I did not, though I saw him soon after I heard the news."

The headman raised his hand. "Since you concealed the fact from Lieutenant Ormond you presumably contemplated some other measure?"

"I had purposed to have gone up there myself."

The headman glanced at him with a curious little smile. "If what you have heard is true I am not sure that I would care to take the risk," he said. "I should,

at least, prefer to take a few files of Lieutenant Ormond's policemen with me."

"What is the risk to one man in comparison with what you will surely have to face if this iniquity is persisted in? If you must have revenue double the tax on gin. I am here to warn you that a very little spark will set the country in a blaze, and in the name of humanity——"

He stopped a moment, straightened himself a trifle with a visible effort, and blinked at them in a curious dazed fashion.

"Sit still, Mr. Ormond!" said the headman in a voice with a little ring in it which the men of a certain famous regiment would have recognized. "Drink this glass of wine. Down with it whether you want it or not. Be quick, Langley!"

Langley ran round the table, but in another moment Ormond lurched forward upon it and the wine ran red across the snowy cloth. The headman bent over him and then raised his hand.

"Surgeon Chester will be at the club. Bring him. Go yourself," he said. "Send the boy here."

Langley knew that when the headman spoke as he did then he expected to be obeyed with celerity, and he was out of the room in a few seconds. When he came back with the surgeon Ormond lay gasping in a hammock and it was evident that the headman had placed him there. The surgeon asked a few sharp questions and then was busy with the sick man for a minute.

"Fever, of course, but I think there's more than that," he said. "The man has been bearing too heavy a strain, and the question is what to do with him? We're rather full at the hospital and I've no great confidence in my new orderlies. The place isn't quite what it should be either, and I sent my last cases among the officers to the club. You may remember what I pointed out when they were putting it up, sir?"

The headman signed to Langley. "You will go across

and tell Mrs. Halifax I should consider it a favour to myself if she would take Mr. Ormond in. Say I scarcely think this recommendation is necessary, though I have much pleasure in making it."

"Then we can consider it as decided, and as the sooner I get him into the blankets the better, we'll start with the hammock," said the doctor.

The bearers moved away with their burden, while when Langley came back he said, "Mrs. Halifax desired me to let you know that this is a responsibility she is glad to share with you."

The headman smiled a trifle dryly. "A most capable woman, and I almost fancy she is right," he said. "It seems to me that Mr. Ormond has been doing a good deal of our work in the country about Opponotax."

"Well," said Langley, "what about the tax?"

"Do you believe the agitation would disappear if we took it off?"

"No, sir," said Langley, who knew his business a good deal better than some folks supposed. "Kwaka means to come out in any case when he's ready, and I only differ from Lieutenant Ormond and trader Weland in regard to the probable time. He may wait a year yet and will not move while we have a strong battalion here."

The haggard soldier smiled grimly. "Then," he said, "I think it would not be advisable to put any obstacle in his way. When we have done with him there will be a better chance of tranquillity in the bush country."

XIX

ORMOND FLIES FROM PERIL

It was a cloudy morning and almost cool when Major Halifax lay cigar in hand in a canvas chair on his ver-

andah. The palm tufts rustled harshly, little puffs of sand whirled about the compound, and the sea was a cold grey-blue, for the north-east breeze which at certain seasons brings the jaded white men in that country new vigour was blowing. The Major was also in a state of tranquil content, for he had slept soundly and made an excellent breakfast, which was more than he had done during several hot and steamy weeks. Still, a trace of concern crept into his face as he glanced at his wife, who lay somewhat languidly in a chair beside him.

"It has occurred to me that you have scarcely seemed very fit the last day or two," he said. "This waiting upon Ormond is telling on you, and I scarcely think you get sufficient quietness. One would also fancy that you would be better resting than holding a regular levee every afternoon. It worries me."

The little lady smiled. "You would not have me turn the headman or Langley away, and they are here as frequently as any one else," she said. "I have really not done much for Ormond, because Millicent has undertaken most of the nursing."

"Of course not!" said the Major. "The headman does precisely what he wishes in this colony, and Langley's by no means so much of a fool as some folks fancy. I don't mind them, but since you and Millicent brought the tea-table out almost every unmarried man in the settlement seems to think he's entitled to spend half the afternoon on my verandah. What do they come for anyway? They seldom seem to think my conversation worth listening to."

Mrs. Halifax laughed. "If I hadn't thought of the teapot it would have cost you a good deal in Madeira and cigars. It was an inspiration suggested by Mr. Ormond's opinions respecting temperance. You insisted upon my having a companion, and this is the result of it."

"I shouldn't be astonished if it was," said Halifax. "Still, it's evident she can't have them all. Now there's Langley and the doctor, young Pole and Pontefract,

without mentioning the headman, and Padget, who, one would fancy, had quite enough of feminine society already."

The Major strolled away and Mrs. Halifax only waited to make sure that Leslie Ormond lay at ease among the cushions in his chair before she also retired to busy herself with her household affairs, and the man was left alone upon the verandah.

It was the first time he had been outside until late in the afternoon and his eyes grew brighter as he drank in the cool breeze and felt his strength coming back to him, but he seemed to be listening, and once or twice glanced expectantly towards the doorway. Then he resolutely turned his head away and looked down across the rustling palms upon the sea, until at last there was a light step in the room behind him. He raised himself suddenly, and a flush of pleasure crept into the whiteness of his face as Millicent entered the verandah. She was dressed in white and sat down close by him, regarding him with a curious gentleness in her grave dark eyes.

"You are very much better this morning," she said.

"That pleases you?"

Millicent laughed. "Of course. You had fallen back a little the last two days, and we were getting almost anxious about you again. Just now, however, there isn't the least doubt that you have made a great stride towards recovery."

"Then I certainly owe it to you, and it is fortunate I am recovering, because I must go back up river almost immediately," he said.

Millicent made a little imperious gesture. "That is quite out of the question," she said decisively. "It is positively wrong of you to think of it, and we mean to keep you here a good while yet. Would that be so very unpleasant?"

Ormond felt a little thrill run through him, but he strove to hold himself in hand.

"It would be so delightful after Opponotax that I

dare not contemplate it," he said. "If only for that reason I must go away."

Millicent smiled and shook her head. "I don't think you are right, and I am sure your comrade would agree with me," she said. "In fact, I once heard him say that such notions were out of place in any man of sense."

"And yours are?"

"I think purposeless self-denial is to be deprecated. It is so often really necessary that I cannot think one could be expected to practise it where there is nothing to be gained."

Ormond's face grew almost grim, and there was a curious glow in his eyes as he looked at the girl.

"You are evidently bent on persuading me," he said with a little smile.

"I think," said Millicent, "that you need somebody who has the courage to preach a little sense to you, and the fact that you are my patient warrants the liberty. You have had nothing but work and worry since you came to Africa, and I am not sure from what Mr. Joynson wrote us, that there is very much you could do at the Mission just now. Stay here and rest while you can. We are anxious to keep you."

The damp stood beaded on Ormond's blanched forehead as the girl, who did not realize what she was doing, smiled at him. Except for the struggle that usually followed it, he had found it blissfully pleasant to lie on the shadowy verandah while she read or talked to him, and there was little brightness in his life at the Mission. Still, he knew that the longing within him was growing stronger with every hour he spent in her company, and that it would, if he stayed there, master him presently.

"I am, however, afraid I must start as soon as I am fit to travel," he said.

Millicent saw, without understanding all their meaning, the signs of the struggle in his face, and once more her eyes grew very compassionate.

"Be a little daring for once and take what is thrust into your hands," she said. "You really owe me a little after nursing you, and I cannot let you go away too soon and make yourself ill again."

"And that would grieve you?" he said with a little ring in his voice.

Millicent was for a moment a trifle startled. She had seen that look in the faces of other men and would have had no doubt as to its meaning had Leslie Ormond been as one of them. She, however, promptly decided that there was no necessity for apprehension in his case. He was an ascetic, an advocate of celibacy, she had heard Joynson say, and one who would, she fancied, regard the love of a woman as a snare. Still, she had not quite recovered her usual serenity when she realized that he was expecting an answer.

"Of course it would grieve us very much," she said, looking away from him.

"Millicent!" the man said hoarsely.

He raised himself a trifle, while his heart throbbed faster than it had done in the fever, and still the girl, who heard the movement and felt her apprehensions confirmed, could not raise her eyes.

In the meanwhile the trace of colour in her half-averted face was very suggestive and a wiser man than Ormond might have been misled by it. As it was, his passion shook him until the restraints he had placed upon it melted away. There was not one chance in a thousand that he would do the woman a wrong by declaring himself, and it seemed that she must have realized what he felt, but he saw once more what the horrible result might be, and with his last failing strength made his decision. It was infinitely preferable that she should think what she pleased of him than run that risk.

She turned to him with a sense of relief that was tempered by a trace of wholly illogical irritation.

"Is there anything you want?" she said, realizing the incongruity of the question, though she felt it was

advisable that they should at once descend to the status of patient and nurse.

"No," said Ormond, with a little grim smile. "That is, nothing it would be fitting for me to have."

"Then there are one or two duties that require my attention," said Millicent.

There was no haste in her movements, but she lost very little time in leaving the verandah, where Ormond lay still with lips set and a growing horror of himself until Mrs. Halifax came in.

"Millicent tells me that you think of leaving us shortly," she said. "You are, however, not fit for the journey."

"Still, I am afraid it must be attempted."

"It would be most unwise."

"I think it is necessary."

Mrs. Halifax glanced at him sharply. "For reasons which do not concern the Mission?"

"In part, at least. Still, I should be easier in mind there. I need not mention the fact that I shall be very sorry to leave you."

The little lady smiled curiously. "I scarcely realized what I was taking upon myself when I asked Miss Gaskell to come out with me as my companion," she said. "You see, I feel a certain responsibility. She will not have you?"

"I'm afraid I did not ask her, madam."

"Well," said the little lady, dryly, "I fancied that you meant to, though I scarcely think Millicent did. Why didn't you?"

Ormond looked at her steadily and his face was a trifle grim. "I should have done her a wrong."

Mrs. Halifax smiled a little. "You are, I believe, too fanciful and take life too seriously. Men of your disposition and opinions not infrequently do. Morbid fancies and an undue sensibility result from too much asceticism."

"You are mistaken in your estimate of my character.

I am a man with, I think, rather stronger passions than most of my fellows, and if I give them the least rein they run away with me. They nearly did so a little while ago."

The little lady saw his shiver and the damp upon his forehead, and both had their significance to her.

"Then is there any valid reason why you shouldn't marry Millicent Gaskell? That is, of course, if she would have you, which is quite another question."

"I think there is, or rather there is a faint probability of one arising. It is a difficulty that could not be got over and might wreck two people's lives. I feel it right to tell you this, because only a little while ago I was on the verge of taking the horrible risk. It might have made me a criminal. And now since I cannot trust my will, I think no bodily peril should stand in the way of my seeking safety in flight."

His hoarseness was very expressive, and Mrs. Halifax fancied that she read contrition and horror in his drawn grey face, but would not show that she did.

"You knew Millicent in England, I think?" she said.

"I did. It was in part, at least, to avoid her that I came to Africa. I have been fittingly rewarded for my cowardice."

"Then you have been in love with her for some time?"

Ormond smiled wearily. "Two years, at least," he said. "Two years of pitiless struggle. I do not think she knows it, though there were times when the longing became almost irresistible. To-day I was beaten to my knees."

Mrs. Halifax regarded him with compassionate sympathy.

"I scarcely think she would have taken you," she said. "That may make it a little easier, but I believe you are right to go away. She will slip out of your memory by and by."

Ormond smiled in a curious fashion. "I am afraid

that will not happen until I die, and though I am not morbid, I shall not be sorry when the fever completes its work on me. I failed in England, and while I was warned that this climate is deadly to me I have failed in Africa. It is only fitting. I aspired to do work which must be reserved for men without my impurities. To-day I was almost willing to take the risk of bringing disgrace upon an innocent girl, and yet there are those who tell me the restraints I would put upon my lower nature are a folly. Well, we have all our burdens, and perhaps when I have gone you will forgive me."

The little lady laid a thin hand gently upon his arm. "How could I forgive you for what you did not do? I shall remember you as a brave man, Leslie Ormond, but I am going to insist upon quietness just now. Emotional tension is not conducive to a quick recovery from fever."

She left him with a little kindly smile, and it was a few days later when she stood on the verandah again, with Millicent by her side, watching the white-robed bearers plod up the hill with Ormond's hammock pole upon their woolly crowns.

"There are," she said, "very few people who understand that man or realize all that he is doing. I am sorry for him. I do not know why, but I think he will never come back again."

XX

A CIVILIZED GENTLEMAN

THE night was a trifle cooler than usual, but Mrs. Konoto could not sleep, and rising softly, partly dressed herself and drew a low chair up to the basket-work table on which a little shaded light was burning. Few Europeans do sleep well in that country, and the girl had for some time been living under a nervous strain, while it had been evident to her that her husband

had spent the past day in a state of expectancy. He had not been communicative, but she felt that something unusual was about to happen.

Addy Konnoto did not know what she was waiting or listening for, but she could not fix her attention on the book she took up.

At last, though she could think of no special reason for doing so, she put out the light and drew her chair to the window, which she softly opened and let the hot smell of the forest in. The latter flung its dense black shadow across all the village, so that she could scarcely see the huts, but there was a pale radiance beyond one part of it where a crescent moon was shining and a strip of the river showed faintly silver. She did not remember how long she watched it, but that one patch of light in the darkness held her eyes, until by and by three or four half-seen objects drifted across it. There was no sound of paddles and the canoes disappeared again, but remembering how the shadow lay black upon the bank she became suddenly intent, since it seemed to her that the men in them had a cause for silence. She waited again with her heart beating a trifle more rapidly, and then heard a very soft patter of naked feet in the gloom below.

Then the verandah stairway creaked and she sat still a moment or two with hands clenched as she realized that they were in the house. It might mean peril to herself or her husband, but the vague, half-superstitious horror she had felt disappeared and she became practical in her apprehension. She would at any risk find out what the strangers' intentions were, and she groped for a dressing-jacket and then for the carefully-hidden pistol Weland had sent her.

Then she opened the door very softly and slipped out on the verandah. It ran round the house, with the heavy thatch projecting over it so that it lay in blackest shadow, and she crept forward in her little velvet shoes. Her heart throbbed painfully, and every sense was

quickened until she felt that quietly as she moved every one in the building must hear her.

Still, she crept forward until she reached a place where a few short steps led from the head of the general stairway to a part of the verandah that was raised a trifle. No sound rose from the village, but she could hear a very low murmur of voices not far away and see a dim ray of light that shone out from a window. She felt her limbs quivering and her courage melting away from her, and it was only a glance at the black wall of forest that drove her on. It was symbolical of so much she feared, that she felt, by an involved train of reasoning, that her apprehensions would be redoubled if she went back now. It was, however, fortunate that her perceptions were quickened, for as she crept up the stairway something touched her dress and she stopped at the moment with noiseless abruptness. Stooping, she felt with her hand until it rested on a strip of tough fibre stretched athwart the steps with the evident intention that any one who desired to take an unsanctioned part in what was going on should fall over it. Addy shivered again as it occurred to her that if the stumble led to his discovery an unpleasant retribution would probably overtake the offender.

She took out the little knife with the mother-of-pearl handle that Konnoto had once sold her for a penny, and remembered he had said that superstition was not confined to Africa as she opened it. Then, for her sojourn in that country had taught her cunning, she closed it again, and feeling for the end of the fibre undid the knot and went softly up the stairway. Stooping low to avoid the faint light, she crept up to a window, drew the latticed sunshades a trifle apart with trembling fingers, and then gasped a little as she looked into the room.

It was lighted by a lamp on a tall brass pilaster, but, though she had last seen it furnished much as the habitation of an Englishman of taste might have been, it was just then bare of everything beyond a table and a few

rude chairs. Still, it was not the transformation in the appearance of the room that had the greatest effect on her. An almost naked man, with a face she feared, stood behind her husband's chair at the foot of the table, and she noticed the curious little gleam in his eyes and how the white string of charms shone in the lamplight upon his greasy skin. He was then touching Konnoto's arm with clawlike fingers. Konnoto, who usually wore white duck garments cut in civilized fashion, as many of the trader headmen do, had cast them off, and was dressed in loose folds of cotton, which left his dusky arms bare to the shoulder and one leg uncovered from the knee. There was also a tattooed pattern, which stood out from it, upon his breast, which the light fabric was but partly flung across.

There was a portentous glitter in his eyes, his face was animal-like and brutal with its suggestion of sensuality and cruelty, while he clenched a big, dusky hand on the table as the minister of the Ju-Ju spoke softly in his ear. Two other men whom Addy had never seen squatted against the wall in the scantiest of attire, and then her eyes fell upon the one at the head of the table. He wore white cotton, as her husband did, but though the value of it was probably two shillings, it curiously suggested regal vesture. The man was elderly and lean, but there was command in his pose, and when she glanced at his imperturbable face she knew who he must be, for there was on it the stamp of dignity. King Kwaka was no trader headman, but the descendant of a fetich dynasty, who held, so his subjects believed, more than temporal dominion, and lived for the most part sequestered from their gaze. It was also said that only one white man had ever seen him.

He said something softly in a bush idiom which Addy could not understand, and her husband rose. He moved forward, and stooping crouched close by Kwaka's side, while there was a little sardonic gleam in the old man's eyes as he glanced at the tattooing upon his breast.

Addy fancied she understood it, for she knew that curiously-raised pattern had not been there long. Then she set her lips as Konnoto stooped further with the King's hand upon his head. She grew hot with rage that for the moment drove out fear as the King pressed down the crouching man until his forehead approached the floor.

Konnoto, however, rose apparently quite unconcerned, and that was the hardest to bear. Then he and the Ju-Ju man stood at Kwaka's side while he spoke to them in a low, even voice. Now and then Konnoto glanced at him inquiringly or made a sign of approbation, but the King disregarded him, and proceeded as one to whom it is sufficient to explain his wishes. Once or twice the girl caught a word she understood, but most of it was incomprehensible. Then the Ju-Ju man turned towards the window and she fled.

It seemed to her that her garments made a horrible rustling, but she had flitted down the short stairway and flung herself behind a wooden pillar when the window was opened and a stream of light shone out into the verandah. Her heart throbbed painfully and she could feel the veins on her forehead swelling, but the window was closed suddenly and all was dark again. She, however, stood still for at least a minute before she dare creep back and make fast the strip of fibre again, and then it was fear and the evident necessity of matching the negroes' cunning that gave her courage.

Still, she accomplished it and crept back close beside the house where the gloom was deepest to her room, and by and by sank into restless sleep, for she had grown accustomed to anxiety and apprehension.

She awakened later than usual next morning, and dressed herself with especial care, though she did not go down until she surmised that Konnoto was finishing his breakfast upon the verandah. Then she approached him smiling with the long white dress flowing in filmy folds about her. The figure it displayed was not quite so

prettily rounded as it had been, and her cheeks were a trifle hollow and had lost their tinge of pink, but the blue eyes were bright still, and the pale gold hair more fluffy than ever, though it cost her no small pains every morning to keep it so in steamy Africa. Konnoto, who was dressed as precisely as usual, had also seen no other white woman for a considerable time and glanced at her with evident approbation.

"I want you to take me away to the Canaries—you promised to," she said.

The man appeared astonished and not altogether pleased. "I am afraid I can't," he said. "Not for four or five months anyway."

"It wouldn't be any pleasure to go away without you," she said. "I should only be anxious. Can't you come?"

Konnoto took out a cigar and lighted it. "I wish I could. That is, to the Canaries," he said with evident sincerity. "But why should you be anxious?"

Addy appeared reflective. "Of course, I don't know all that is going on in the bush, but I suspect a good deal. I'm afraid there's going to be trouble, and I wouldn't like you to be led into it."

"We'll admit that there may be a trifling difficulty. Isn't that a very good reason why I shouldn't go away?"

The girl looked at him steadily. "Konnoto," she said, "are you going to fight for the English?"

"Could any one expect me to?" and the man's face grew almost brutal again.

"You are a civilized gentleman, and you married me. Still, I've more reasons."

The man appeared to shake off his anger and laughed a little. "The last would be sufficient if it wasn't generally understood that a woman belongs to her husband's country. What are the rest?"

"We'll go on with the same one. Would it be fit for a man like you to go out—perhaps dressed as they were—with almost naked savages who would cut the people they got hold of into pieces as they did once before?"

I heard about it at the settlement. And they murdered white women, too. You know you couldn't stop them, and ever after you could never meet a white man as a friend again. I think that would mean you would become what the rest are by and by."

There were signs of a struggle in Konnoto's face and he fumbled with his cigar.

"I really don't think there will be very much trouble," he said.

Addy, who had her own notions on this point, braced herself for an effort.

"Still," she said with a little sparkle in her eyes, "if there was any, the black people couldn't hold out long. You have been in England—and you understand."

Konnoto smiled a trifle drily. "The English could send out troops enough to beat us, but I don't think they would take the trouble," he said. "It would, you see, cost a good deal of money, and if we only showed the Administration we were serious they would let us do what we liked in our own country."

"What is it you want to do?"

"It would be pleasanter to govern my people as it pleases me and not as Commissioner Langley or Tommy Ormond thinks fit to tell me," he said.

"The others would never let you, and I think they would be harder to get on with than Commissioner Langley."

"One can't do everything at once," he said. "If we made the Administration understand we were to be left alone, and I do not think it would be very difficult, I should be able to grapple with the others. We have only to beat the black troops once and then hold out in the swamps where they can't get at us until they give us what we want. They would let us have it to save expense and because there would be no trade while the trouble was going on."

Addy rose and laid her hand upon his arm. "They might, perhaps, if you kept your heads and only fought,"

she said. "You would do that, Konnoto, but the others would kill people—horribly, and, because I am English, I know what the result of that would be. If you murdered two or three of the white traders they would grudge no men or money, and if they had to drain the swamps and cut down the forests they'd get at you."

Konnoto sat thoughtfully silent awhile, for he knew there were parts of Western Africa where as much had been done, and the men who had trusted to those fastnesses to shelter them from the white men's anger had been ceremoniously hanged.

"There may be no trouble after all," he said.

Addy slipped an arm about him and laid her fluffy head upon his shoulder. "Then come away to the Canaries with me and you'll be out of it in any case," she said.

"I would like to," he said. "Still——"

"Then decide," said Addy eagerly. "Promise me you'll come. We'll start next week and get up a concert every evening at the hotel. Then we'll make driving parties for Arucas and Sta. Briggida. Everybody will want to come. It will be lovely to have nobody to worry us and sit down to dinner with lots of white people to talk to in the big cool room. You know you'd like it as much as I do."

She stopped abruptly, for an almost naked man, curiously tattooed, with a string of charms glistening on his dusky skin, glided into the verandah and signed to Konnoto. The latter, who rose, glanced at her deprecatingly as he moved away, and Addy set her lips tight as she realized that she had to face defeat.

XXI

A CLEAR CASE

COMMISSIONER LANGLEY was very muddy and somewhat ruffled in temper as he lay among the roots of a

big cottonwood beside the narrow trail. It wound down, scarcely a foot in width, out of a land of never-lifting shadow, but the forest was a trifle more open just there and a ray of moonlight shining through between the great branches showed the muddy hollow. It had been made in the days when the slavers crept up the miry creeks among the mangroves which hid them from the watchful eyes of the gunboats' commanders, and since then had been worn deep by two generations of bushmen's naked feet. There was very little to attract the white man in the country it meandered through, but Lieutenant Ormond and the Commissioner had spent several unpleasant days there in company with a handful of black soldiers. The latter were just then hidden among the undergrowth, and because they knew their business the most suspicious native scouts might have passed that way without seeing one of them.

Langley took out a little case, which was as damp as everything he had upon him, and looked longingly at a cigar.

"I scarcely think it would draw if I lighted it, but I would very much like to try," he said. "We have been here eight hours already and one must do something. I wonder if those confounded bushmen are ever coming."

"Well," said Tommy, "I can't be sure of it. From information in my possession, acquired by means you mightn't sanction, I believe they didn't get more than two-thirds or so of the rifles that were landed through, and that was why I made myself aggressively busy at places well away from the river."

Langley put a curb on his temper, for he had an unpleasant suspicion that the petty miseries he was enduring rather appealed to his companion's sense of humour.

"I never could quite see what they wanted rifles for," he said. "It would be a good deal easier to get their man with a handful of potleg that scatters well."

"I've no doubt of that, and that is what makes the

fact that they want rifles significant to me. You see, you can't load and prime a flintlock in a hurry, and then if you're not careful you shake the powder out of the pan. While you're getting about it a drilled man would put several bullets or his bayonet into you."

"And the deduction is?"

Tommy smiled curiously. "It seems to me they don't want those rifles to shoot bushmen with," he said. "The flintlock would do for them. It's also tolerably evident that the man who seems to realize that the latter isn't much use against troops has a certain amount of intelligence. I don't see how he could have arranged to bring the rifles out from England and run them in from the slavers' creek if he hadn't."

"It would not be difficult with Weland's co-operation."

"Excuse me," said Tommy decisively, "Weland wouldn't do it. It's quite out of the question."

Langley smiled, a trifle unpleasantly. "It would be hard to persuade the headman, or any one else with much discernment, of the fact, if we lay hands upon his boys bringing the cases down," he said.

Tommy said nothing further and there was silence for an hour at least. At times eerie sounds came out of the forest, but it grew impressively still again, so that Langley started once or twice at the splashing of a great drop of moisture upon a leaf and the faint rustle of undergrowth as one of the policemen moved. At last it was a relief to feel Lieutenant Ormond's grip upon his arm.

"Keep still!" he said harshly, though his voice was low. "I think they're coming now."

Langley could hear nothing at all for at least a minute and then he caught a faint, pattering sound. It grew a trifle louder, until he fancied he could recognize it as the fall of naked feet, and projecting his head from behind the cottonwood root he looked about him. The trail showed silvery in the moonlight here and there, for it was wet and miry and flung back the light, but there was no sign of a policeman anywhere. Then Ormond drew him

back with a little more sharpness than Langley felt there was any occasion for.

"Keep down ; the light's on you," he said. "They'd see a white face half a mile off."

Langley made no rejoinder and sank down among the roots when he next looked round. Then he crouched very still, for a naked man with a wooden case upon his head rose suddenly out of the shadow. There were more behind him, and they flitted into the moonlight one by one, big, dusky men, swinging along at a pace no white man in that country could have emulated under their burdens.

A few seconds later Tommy sprang to his feet, and a shrill whistle rang across the forest. Then there was a sudden shouting and men who dropped their burdens came running back up the trail. They were met and jostled by those who ran forward in the opposite direction, and then stood stupidly still as the two white men stepped out from behind the tree. One of the latter flung at them a few sharp words they could understand, while though the rest of what he said was probably unintelligible, there was no doubt about the meaning of the glinting pistol he held.

Langley in the meanwhile glanced about him and afterwards admitted that Lieutenant Ormond had done his work efficiently. The negroes were clustered together, some still with the cases upon their heads, while a pair of dusky policemen closed the trail in front of and behind them.

Then there was a crash as one of the negroes flung down his case and a shadowy figure sprang into the bush. Langley saw it for a moment flitting among the trunks, and there was a sharp ringing as a rifle flashed. The shadow vanished, but Ormond's voice rose commandingly.

"Let him go !" he said. "Close in a pace or two. Bring down the first man who bolts, Sergeant Samadu."

The dusky policemen drew nearer each other, narrow-

ing the gaps between them, which any negro who might feel inclined to break away must pass through, while Tommy raised his pistol a trifle as he glanced at one man who was moving nervously. The hint was sufficient, and the carriers stood very still while the sergeant spoke to them in the bush tongue.

"Any man who tries to run away will certainly be shot," he said. "Now take up the cases and get on again. It may happen when we reach the river that the white men will let most of you go."

Those who had flung down their burdens once more poised them upon their woolly crowns, and the dusky carriers plodded on down the winding trail with a policeman between every three or four of them.

"You really contrived it neatly. What are we going to do with them?" said Langley, when they had plunged into the shadowy bush again.

"You could keep two of them to question and let the others go when we reach the canoes," said Tommy.

"You speak as if you were sure the canoes would be there."

"Well," said Tommy, "I think I am. You see, whoever is putting this thing through is a capable man and not likely to leave the rifles lying about every here and there. He'll have the whole journey worked out to a nicety and every relay of carriers and canoes ready."

"It is necessary to be ambiguous. Why don't you mention him?"

"I'm not quite sure of him. Still, it's not Weland, or Kwaka either, though the rifles may be for him."

They pushed on through the hot darkness for four or five hours, and because few white men undertake much physical exertion in that country, and the carriers marched well, Langley was very weary, and even more muddy than he had been, when they plodded down towards a winding creek as a little faint light showed in the eastern sky.

Ormond sent two policemen forward, and when they

had vanished amidst the undergrowth bade one of the carriers cry aloud. The man twice sent a high-pitched summons ringing across the forest, and then while the white men stood listening an answer came out of the mist.

Langley nodded. "Yes," he said, "the canoes are evidently there, and if it's any gratification to you I have pleasure in admitting that you have been—ah—almost astonishingly correct in your reasoning."

"It's my business," said Tommy dryly. "If I made many blunders in some of the places I go into I would run a serious risk of not getting out again."

Then he turned to the negro and signed to the dusky sergeant to translate what he said. "Tell them you have brought the cases far enough and they had better come up and take them down," he said.

The negro shouted again, there was an answer in the mist, a patter of feet, and three or four shadowy figures flitted out of the gloom. Two policemen rose out of the undergrowth behind them, there was a short scuffle, a shout of warning, and the strangers were prisoners. Then a splash of paddles rose from the river, and Ormond went headlong down the trail, which was steep just there, with two of his men behind him. The crash of a rifle rose out of the mist, there was a hoarse shouting, but the thud of paddles grew louder, and when Langley reached the edge of the water, where the light was a trifle clearer, he found his comrade standing in one of two big canoes with a cluster of almost naked negroes squatting in the bottom of her.

Ormond laughed somewhat dolefully. "They have got away with one craft, but it doesn't matter very much," he said. "We have boys enough to get all the information you are likely to have any use for out of here. Go up and see they bring those cases down, Sergeant Samadu."

There was a crimson glare behind the cottonwoods before the last case was carried down, and then while a

policeman watched the men in the canoe Langley stood on the bank with the carriers in front of him. Ormond sat in the canoe a yard or two away from him with the big pistol lying at his side, and Sergeant Samadu conducted the examination. It lasted for the greater portion of half an hour, and then Langley looked at his white companion.

"Well?" he said.

"I think they've told us all they know, and that's very little," said Tommy. "Somebody made a bargain for the portorage of the rifles with their headman. We might spend a month trying to get hold of him, and these fellows are no more responsible than so many dray horses would be in any other country. I don't know of any reason why we shouldn't let them go."

Langley expressed agreement and Sergeant Samadu raised his hand.

"You may go home, you worthless heathen, and be thankful to the most merciful white man who did not have you all shot, as you should have been," he said. "He is a great magician, and everybody is afraid of him between here and Kwaka's country. I do not, however, mean the man with the glass eye."

The bushmen scattered upon the word, and Langley, who knew more than a little of the bush idioms, which are somewhat involved, smiled a trifle dryly as he glanced at Ormond.

"I almost fancy the sergeant's attitude is not—ah—quite unreasonable," he said. "Well, we will see what is to be got out of these others."

He stepped on board the canoe, and as he approached one of the negroes said quietly, "I go tread upon that foot you got if it lib in my way."

The man drew his naked leg aside instantly, and Langley smiled at Ormond.

"Yes," he said, "I felt sure he was a factory boy. Where you lib for come from?"

"Sapolto, sah," said the man, who evidently realized

it was useless to attempt to conceal the fact that he spoke English now.

Langley made a little gesture which implied that he expected this. "How many of you be Cappy Weland's boy?"

The man held up four fingers and pointed to the negroes nearest him, after which he glanced contemptuously at the rest. "Those other boy, him dam, low, 'tief black bushman, sah."

Langley turned to Ormond. "It seems sufficiently clear to me," he said.

"Still, I'm going to ask you if you recognize these men."

"Yes," said Tommy very slowly. "Two of them."

"You have seen them working for Weland at the Sapolto factory?"

"I have."

Langley nodded. "Well," he said, "we'll open at least a few of the cases now."

It was done with some difficulty, and when new rifles carefully packed were revealed the Commissioner smiled sardonically.

"I think that is quite sufficient," he said. "As soon as we reach the outpost I will give you an order for trader Weland's arrest."

Tommy stood up with one hand clenched and his face a trifle flushed. "Then," he said grimly, "I'll have to see it carried out, but it will be the biggest blunder you ever made in your life. You are at liberty to repeat this opinion to the headman if you consider it an impertinence."

Langley smiled a little. "I am," he said, "disposed to—ah—disregard the little display of temper. In the meanwhile, as I purpose taking the boys down the river as well as the rifles, I must ask you to make the necessary arrangements."

Ormond did as he was bidden, and in ten minutes the canoes were sliding down the creek with the captives at

the paddles, while the two policemen who kept watch in each, rifle in hand, made it evident that it would not be advisable for any man to jump over. They also reached the outpost after a very tedious but uneventful journey late on a hot night, and Langley, who was given Tommy's room, at once went to sleep. He also slept usually well, and rising considerably later than he had purposed, found Tommy, who seemed concerned and embarrassed, awaiting him on the verandah.

"I'm very much afraid that one of the boys has got away," he said. "Still, as I rather fancy that we can get hold of him again, and breakfast's waiting, you had perhaps better have it instead of worrying about the thing."

"I saw them handcuffed in the detention shed myself," said Langley.

"You did," said Tommy. "If it's any consolation to you, so did I. Still, they're not all of them there now. What I am, however, a good deal more concerned about is the fact that Sergeant Samadu can't find my sentry either."

Langley, who realized that where all had probably the same tale to tell, one witness more or less did not greatly matter, asked a few questions and proceeded with his breakfast, after which he decided to push on down river. He expressed his approbation of what Ormond had done when he got into the canoe, and then looked at him curiously.

"If I could have spared you one duty I think I would have done it," he said. "You will, however, arrest Mr. Weland when you find an opportunity."

"It shall be done," said Tommy, with an expressionless face, very quietly.

The canoe slid away, and it was half an hour later when Sergeant Samadu came into the outpost with a half-naked man, who appeared unpleasantly apprehensive.

"The sentry and the prisoner have been found much

sooner than was expected," he said in his own tongue.

Tommy glanced sternly at the trembling negro. "They have ways of making people tell the truth in Kwaka's country. I have been there and am acquainted with one or two that seldom fail," he said. "Take him away and give him his breakfast while I consider how we will begin with him."

The sergeant removed his prisoner and came back grinning. "The man is badly afraid already," he said.

Tommy smiled drily. "So much the better!" he said. "What we have done would, I fancy, get men who are thought a good deal more of than we are into very serious difficulties, Sergeant Samadu. That is, of course, if anybody knew about it. Still, I think it is warranted. Now, Mr. Commissioner Langley will no doubt proceed as it pleases him and spend eight or ten days in ascertaining what is not the truth, while we shall, I hope, arrive at it in rather less than as many minutes."

XXII

HAMMOND JOYNSON'S VIEWS

COMMISSIONER LANGLEY reached the seaboard settlement safely with his prisoners, and while he interrogated them and recorded their somewhat conflicting answers, Major Halifax, who had several confidential discussions with him, was seized with an inspiration. It occurred to him that he would go up river and shoot a leopard, or at least prowl through the bush in search of one, which, as he told the headman, would at once allay the suspicions of any niggers who might wonder what he was doing there and enable him to make a survey of the country.

The headman, as it happened, agreed with him, and to make his innocent intentions more apparent still,

Halifax took only two or three black soldiers with him, besides his wife and Millicent, whom he purposed to leave at the Mission.

It also chanced that when Tommy Ormond was about to proceed with the examination of his prisoner by more drastic means than Commissioner Langley would have employed, a bushman arrived at the outpost with news that a very lively affray was then going on in a certain bush village. As the result Lieutenant Ormond left Weland's boy in the custody of a corporal without having elicited any information of value from him, and taking five or six men with him plunged into the forest. He also restored tranquillity in the native village with some difficulty and afterwards spent several days pursuing the men who had conspired to disturb it through the bush, while at least a week had passed when, after reflecting on what he had heard during his journey, he decided to call at the Mission.

It was a Sunday evening when he reached it, and finding nobody in the house, walked towards the little lighted church, where he took his place beside Mrs. Halifax, exercising some little discretion as he did it.

The body of the little church was dimly lighted, but a row of big wax candles burned upon the altar, which, as Tommy remembered, was only customary on special days. It was also decorated with clusters of snowy lilies, while Leslie Ormond wore his hood over his surplice, which Tommy had never seen him do before in Africa, and the few rows of dusky converts at the back of the building were robed decorously in spotless cotton. Millicent sat at the little organ, Joynson was also in the chancel, and it was evident to Tommy that the celebration of some special festival was being proceeded with.

It was Commemoration Sunday, and a cluster of crosses rose upon the river bank in testimony that patient men who had braved gunshot and pestilence had already laid down their lives at Opponotax. Tommy stood

very still during the hymn, while Millicent's sweet contralto and the voices of the rest joined in, for, as he observed to Mrs. Halifax afterwards, if the Reverend Hammond couldn't preach he certainly could sing, until with the closing chords the converts raised the "Hallelujah."

After that the music took hold of Thomas Ormond and carried him away as it very probably would not have done, at least in the same fashion, in another place. His feelings might not have met with Leslie Ormond's unqualified approbation, since they were almost as Imperialistic as devotional, but he had done his duty with a single heart and had seen the fallen in the fight, black man and white, shattered by ragged potleg, rotting alive with pestilence, and dying of fever, while as he sang he heard the tramp of dusky men marching with arms reversed behind a lurching hammock and saw the lonely crosses in the forest. The blood poured out in the dark land had, perhaps, not been shed in vain. Leslie, it seemed, believed it, for hope was stamped upon his worn, blanched face.

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.

There was another verse, but Tommy's thoughts were wandering and he only caught the crash of the closing harmonies and the "Hallelujah."

Then he turned swiftly, for a voice he recognized had joined in it, and he saw Weland, who had apparently entered during the singing, standing close behind him. At another time Tommy Ormond might have betrayed a trace of disconcertion or embarrassment, but, as it happened, he was scarcely sensible of either just then, and looked steadily at his friend. He knew his duty and it must be done.

Then Leslie Ormond stood out in the middle of the chancel with a roll in his hand and read aloud the names of those who had fallen at Opponotax, one little section

of the illustrious legion of honour who have laid down their lives in Western Africa :—

STEPHEN COMBER, died of fever.

CECIL JARDINE, slain with the sword.

ALLEN HARDACRE, died of a gunshot wound.

LEMUEL BOON, of fever.

CARSON ELLERBY, drowned.

ELLEN COMBER, invalided, died at sea.

LILIAN ELLERBY——

He stopped abruptly, and there was a moment's deep silence as he turned towards the altar holding up the roll, while his voice broke a little as he said, "For all these Thy saints——"

Tommy listened quietly to the rest of the service, though he was now sensible that Weland was behind him and wished it had happened differently. Then he rose as the white-robed natives filed out, and took up his station just outside the doorway.

In the meanwhile Weland waited until Millicent left the organ, and moved down the aisle at her side.

"I wonder if you remember another time when you and I and Leslie Ormond were in church together?" she said.

Weland smiled a little. "There are occasions one remembers a very long while."

Then as they went out together, with Mrs. Joynson and Mrs. Halifax a few paces in front of them, Thomas Ormond stepped out of the shadow.

"I think you had better join the others, Millicent," he said.

The girl stopped and looked at him, for it seemed to her that there was a curious harshness in Tommy's tone and that his face, on which the dim light fell, was grim. Weland, who had already noticed this, smiled as he turned to her.

"Tommy and I have business together. You will excuse us," he said.

Millicent moved forward with her heart beating a trifle faster than usual, and Weland looked at Ormond.

"I have a devilishly unpleasant thing to do," said Tommy. "Still, I'm not responsible for it and it must be done."

Weland smiled dryly. "Of course! Never mind the excuses, Tommy. I think, I understand."

"Then," and Tommy dropped his hand upon his shoulder, "you are my prisoner. We seized two canoe loads of rifles paddled by your boys."

"I fancied I had told you those boys ran away from me."

"You did, but it seems that Langley doesn't believe it. It isn't necessary to tell you what my opinion is. The one question is, Will you give me your word not to try to get away, and you have mine that until I can send you down river nobody shall guess you're not coming with me to the outpost or staying there because you want to?"

"No," said Weland, dryly, "I will not give it you. Tommy Ormond is, I believe, still a friend of mine, but I want no favours from an officer of this colony's police. If you had waited a little I should not have felt it as I do, because I should, at least, have got most of the Company's goods and the produce that is due to them safely away from Sapolto. As it is, even if I am acquitted, Langley has come near ruining the factory."

"Very sorry!" said Tommy. "Devilish hard on you, but what can I do? Try to look at it sensibly and make me that promise. If not, I'll have to put my men in charge of you."

"Of course!" said Weland, grimly, "I can't blame you."

Weland said nothing further, and when Joynson came out of the church Tommy made him acquainted with the state of affairs. The Reverend Hammond was evidently much disturbed, but he promised to conceal the facts from the rest.

"I feel there has been a deplorable mistake, but in the meanwhile we can only submit," he said. "I will give Mr. Weland a room, and you can, if you wish it, place one of your men on the verandah."

Tommy glanced round the room he showed them into. "Where does that door lead to?" he asked, pointing to an inner one.

"My wife's dressing-room, which can only be reached by the inside stairway," said Joynson, who opened the door, and taking a key from the inside locked it and handed the key to Tommy. "Now I presume you will be contented?"

"I can understand your feelings and sympathize with them," he said. "Still, you're not exactly warranted in holding me accountable."

Joynson said nothing further, but it was perhaps because he pointed to the other lock as they went out that Tommy contented himself with turning the key and leaving it in the door, though he posted a sentry close outside it. Then he went down and joined the others.

"Weland has made quite a long journey," he said. "I think he's going to sleep. It doesn't seem very sociable, but he'll make his own excuses."

He felt that Millicent's eyes were upon him and that she was rather more than dubious.

"That is a little astonishing," she said, "Mr. Weland did not seem in the least drowsy when I saw him a few minutes ago. Did you fancy he was, Mr. Joynson?"

"No," said the Reverend Hammond, dryly. "I certainly did not. Still, if you have any questions to ask I must refer you to Lieutenant Ormond."

The flush in Tommy's face grew a trifle more evident and Millicent fancied that the missionary was by no means pained to notice his embarrassment.

"I have something a good deal more important than Weland's sleepiness to tell you about," he said. "I came across the Major in the bush, Mrs. Halifax."

"He sent an effusive message?" said the little lady.

Tommy laughed softly. "I can't say that he did, though he mentioned that he was coming for you in a few days and he hoped you would be ready."

"Well," she said, "we will be ready. I wish I could persuade Mrs. Joynson to come down river too."

"That," said Tommy, who became suddenly intent, "is just what I want to do. I have come to warn you, Leslie, that you will certainly have the bushmen down on you before the month is out. There is no doubt that they are coming, and Mr. Joynson, at least, knows what happened on the last occasion."

There was a sudden stillness and Joynson's face grew very grave. "I shall," he said, "remember it as long as I live."

"Well," said Tommy, grimly, "you can't be anxious to face it again, and if you were it would not be fitting to expose your converts to the risk. Kwaka will cut the throat of every one he can lay his hands upon. Now, it's quite evident that you can gain nothing by staying here, and the one course open to you is to go down river with the Major."

Leslie Ormond straightened himself a trifle in his chair and his lean face was curiously resolute, while the light Tommy had seen there in the church crept back into his eyes.

"It is right that Mrs. Joynson should go, but most unfitting that I should leave my post," he said.

"Now," said Tommy, sharply, "try to be sensible. A live missionary of your kind can do good, but he's no great use to anybody when he's dead."

Joynson looked at his wife with a curious expression and then turned to Tommy. "If I remember correctly you gave us a similar warning at least a month ago, and the bushmen have not come yet," he said. "Now, I do not admit for a moment that I am anxious to be shot or speared. Far from it! I consider it every man's duty to preserve and efficiently nourish his body, and, as you

observe, very little can be expected from a dead missionary."

He stopped a moment, and Millicent, who decided that no sensible person could take exception to this, felt a little thrill of approbation as she glanced at Leslie Ormond's face, in which there was a vague suggestion of exultation. He, at least, had no thought of avoiding the horrible risk.

Joynson, however, had apparently only concluded the preamble, for he was usually a trifle pedantic and prolix, and he placed his finger tips together as he proceeded, while his wife, whom Millicent glanced at covertly, smiled as though she understood him.

"The point is this," he said. "If I was sure that the bushmen would kill us I would go as fast as possible now, but that is just what no man can determine. No prevision of what is ordained is vouchsafed to us. Nor do we know that the bushmen will come. Lieutenant Ormond believes they will do so, but Lieutenant Ormond is occasionally mistaken. I have, in fact, known this happen."

He glanced at Tommy, who smiled a little deprecatingly, and then proceeded, with forefinger raised, in his platform manner: "That being so, we have to consider what the effect upon our flock and the heathen would be if we fled from our duty when no one pursued. It could only be disastrous to the efficacy of this Mission."

"Bravo!" said Tommy, gravely, while Mrs. Joynson's eyes shone. "I feel I ought to ask your pardon for one or two fancies I had a little while ago. Still, it's out of all reason that you should stay here."

Leslie Ormond smiled a little. "To be merely practical, Tommy, would you leave your outpost at the mercy of Kwaka's bushmen before you even knew they meant to attack it, when that would cast a stain on your service that could not be wiped out in twenty years?"

"No," said Tommy. "Of course not! Still, you

don't quite grasp the point. I know they're coming. Can't you persuade your husband, Mrs. Joynson?"

The climate-worn lady smiled. "I should not be willing to attempt it," she said simply. "We have no children and it is all my duty to stay with him."

Then Mrs. Halifax, leaning forward, touched Lieutenant Ormond's shoulder, "Tommy," she said softly, "you can do no more. I am not sure that it would be right of you if you could."

XXIII

MILLICENT MAKES A BARGAIN

"WHERE is Mr. Weland, Tommy?" said Millicent, stopping as she met Lieutenant Ormond in a corridor.

"I fancy," he said, "you or one of the others asked me that before."

"Why did you send that man up to the verandah?" she asked sharply. "He's right in front of Mrs. Joynson's room, and she and I are going to sit there, presently."

"I'll tell him to go farther along at once," said Tommy.

"No," she said. "Send him away. I don't like him there."

"I'm afraid I can't," said Tommy, a trifle dryly.

"Now I understand," she said. "When you told me Weland was sleeping you should have remembered there is nothing in that room he could sleep on. Do you think that anybody who knew what he did when you had the fever would be pleased with you?"

"Well," said Tommy, "I am by no means especially pleased with myself just now, but that is quite outside the question. One has to do what he's told, you see. It's evident you don't quite grasp that fact. You're not a policeman."

Millicent smiled sweetly. "And you are. I once

heard you observe that most men find their own level in this country. You have an uncle who is a Colonel, and your grandfather was a Brigadier."

She turned and left him to console himself with this, and being a somewhat determined young woman, went up the inner stairway to Mrs. Joynson's room. A light was burning there and it showed her that there was no key in the other door. There was, however, one in the door by which she had entered, and deciding that the locks were most likely all the same she took it out and inserted it in the empty one, and passed into the other room.

The lamp was lighted and the man who sat close by rose with a little smile which she was pleased to see. He had, as she had observed already, a reassuring habit of regarding whatever happened as though it were perfectly usual.

"I am glad somebody has remembered me," he said. "I was getting a trifle lonely."

"I am afraid I can't stay very long," she said. "Still, I was not sure that Tommy would allow any of us to see you, and I felt it would be most unfitting if we let you go away without some expression of our sympathy."

"Do you think I deserve it?" said Weland, dryly.

A faint warmth crept into Millicent's cheek, but she looked at him steadily.

"Of course!" she said with a simplicity that was very eloquent.

"Supplying natives who mean to use them against one's countrymen with rifles is, I think, rightly looked down upon."

Millicent laughed softly, though there was a curious sparkle in her eyes. "Still," she said, "you never did it."

Weland made her a little inclination. "I'm afraid I can't quite express myself as I would like," he said. "The position, you see, makes it difficult."

Millicent fancied she understood him, and the faint

warm tinge showed a trifle plainer in her cheek as she said, "Why did you come here?"

"To warn Leslie Ormond that it would be advisable for him to close the Mission, and suggest that Joynson and he and Mrs. Halifax, who I heard was here, should go down river. I am not quite sure there wasn't another reason."

Millicent sat silent a moment or two. "I think I may tell you that I was very displeased with Tommy," she said. "Of course, he had to do as he was ordered, but he might have remembered what he owes you and have made it easier for you."

"Tommy is really not to be blamed. He was anxious to show me every consideration if I would give him my word I would make no attempt to get away."

"Why didn't you give it?"

"Because I mean to make the attempt if I get the opportunity."

Millicent looked at the man steadily. "I think we are friends, and that, perhaps, entitles one to take a liberty," she said. "Wouldn't that blacken appearances against you, and do you think it would be very considerate to those who believe in you? There are, at least, one or two."

"I scarcely think it would please them more to have me tried and found guilty," he said. "I think I know who the real offenders are, but I feel tolerably sure that I could not prove it to the satisfaction of anybody."

"It is an unpleasant question, but even if you escaped from Tommy, wouldn't you find it difficult to get out of the country?"

"I don't greatly care whether I get out of the country or not so long as I am left alone at Sapolto for the next month or so. So far as my prospects in this colony go I am already a ruined man."

Millicent seized upon the point which seemed safest. "Why are you so anxious to get back there?"

Weland leaned forward a trifle in his chair. "Even

a man in my position may have a little pride left," he said. "There is, I think, scarcely a white man in the country besides myself who could keep the factory standing during the next month or two. That is because the bushmen believe in the Sapolto Ju-Ju. I have made large contracts with them, supplied them with goods on credit, and pledged myself that the Company will pay them for the produce sent down, and now the trouble I expected is on the point of breaking out every canoe that can be loaded is bringing goods down river. It means, for one thing, a good deal of money put into my employers' pockets, and a little into my own, if I can get that produce disposed of before Kwaka marches out."

"For one thing. What is the other?"

Weland laughed. "The feeling that my employers will not be sorry they had confidence in me, and the satisfaction of winding up their affairs creditably, which, of course, is only one form of vanity. On the other hand, if Tommy takes me down river now not another package of goods will be sent, and the bushmen will in all probability burn the factory."

Millicent sat silent, looking at him with a little sparkle in her eyes. She could grasp his point of view, though it seemed to her that he had not made the most of it, and felt a curious thrill of sympathy and approbation.

"Still, could not Tommy go to Sapolto and seize you there?" she said.

"No," said Weland. "If my surmises are correct, Tommy has a three or four days' march he cannot put off before him now, while he and Commissioner Langley will have their hands too full to worry about me very shortly."

"And you and one other white man would be left alone at Sapolto?"

"With the Ju-Ju, a few good rifles; and a handful of Kroo boys who could be relied upon. I fancy it would be sufficient," said Weland, dryly.

Millicent rose and walked to the window. The shaded light scarcely reached it, and when she drew the lattice a trifle open she could see the shadowy figure of the sentry on the verandah. There was nobody else in sight, and she moved back again and turned to the man.

"Then," she said slowly, "if you will avoid any risk that is not absolutely necessary you shall go back to Sapolto."

Weland rose and gazed at her in astonishment, but it was evidently not the hope of escape that stirred him most.

"Why do you want that promise?" he asked almost harshly.

Millicent smiled, though her cheeks were flushed. "Because we, that is I and one or two others, believe in you, and would like you to accomplish what you have to do. Still I am going to ask for something else. If I ever ask you to do something for me you will do it unquestioningly?"

"Of course," said Weland, with a curious quietness, though there was a gleam in his eyes. "Still, I would have done it in any case. I can't make a bargain with you."

Millicent smiled a little. "It must, however, be a bargain. You will do what I tell you even if it is to benefit the Government?"

"Whatever you ask! Still, I do not see how I am to get away."

Millicent laughed softly. "It is delightfully simple. The sentry is watching at the window here, Tommy is waiting until his men come in the living-room, and there is no reason why you should not slip out by that door and through the window of Mrs. Joynson's room. You would have no difficulty in getting down."

Weland stood still looking at her, and it was only for a moment that the girl met his gaze. Then a little quiver seemed to run through him, and he set his lips as he

walked with her to the door. She stopped a moment there and held out her hand.

"Your boys are in the larger shed, and I think there will be nobody about," she said, and her voice had the faintest suggestion of a tremble in it. "I may ask you to redeem that promise by and by."

Weland took her hand and held it while he looked down into her face. "You have my word—even if it is to serve the Government. You are a very dutiful subject."

"No," said the girl, softly, though she now met his eyes. "It is not exactly that. When one believes in any one it is pleasant to see the fact that the belief is warranted made evident to everybody. We are—as you suggested—most of us inclined to vanity."

A flush swept across Weland's face, and his fingers tightened on her hand. The veins showed swollen on his forehead, and then his grasp relaxed and his hand fell to his side. "I am," he said a trifle hoarsely, "a disgraced and ruined man."

Then he turned swiftly, and Millicent stood in the doorway until she heard the window opened and a soft thud below. With a little gasp of relief she moved softly towards the window of the room he had occupied and glanced at the sentry. She fancied by his attitude that he was looking down into the compound, and slipping back into Mrs. Joynson's room she locked the door, and restoring the key to the place she took it from, hastened to her own room and sat down quivering.

She was not sure how long she waited there in the darkness, but by and by she heard Tommy Ormond walk along the verandah and knock at the door of the room where he had placed his prisoner. There was naturally no answer, and Tommy, who went in, summoned the sergeant. Millicent heard the murmur of their voices until Tommy said something very sharply to the sergeant, who ran down the stairway. He came back in a minute or two with Joynson, while Millicent

slipped out and followed Mrs. Joynson, who, though Tommy was evidently not pleased at this, also appeared on the verandah.

"I must ask you what you have done with Weland, sir?" he said.

"I might recommend you to make inquiries of the sentry."

"I have," said Tommy, impatiently. "The man hasn't seen him. Can't you suggest anything, sir?"

Joynson placed his finger-tips together, and smiled a trifle dryly, for he was very human.

"Only that it might have been wiser if you had made sure of the other key."

Then Mrs. Joynson held her hand up. "Listen!" she said. "Can't you hear the sound of paddles?"

Millicent felt her heart throb and a warmth creep upwards from her neck as a splash and thud which grew louder rose from the river. Joynson, however, smiled.

"I certainly think I do. It is, one would fancy, Mr. Weland going away," he said.

Tommy flashed a swift glance at him. "Then there's nothing to be gained by worrying any more. You would, I quite expect, be a good deal longer than was necessary getting a canoe out, and I couldn't overtake him. After all I've been trying to do for him he's a most ungrateful brute."

Millicent laughed. "That is really a little difficult to understand. I scarcely think you would consider any one had conferred a great benefit on you by making you a prisoner, especially if you hadn't committed any offence."

"Of course you all sympathize with him," said Tommy. "I shouldn't wonder if you were delighted that he got away."

"I may, at least, admit that I am not especially sorry," said Joynson, dryly.

Tommy glanced at the rest, and a little smile crept into his eyes. "Well," he said, "no more am I."

XXIV

IN THE BLOOD

It was very dark, and rather hotter than usual. Weland and Blower lounged in canvas chairs on the factory verandah.

The former, who had been busy in the stifling sheds since early morning, and knew he would probably not sleep all night, lay languidly in his chair. The flag drooped in tatters above him, wet with the dew, and it was significant that while there was a light in the room behind them the men sat clear of door and window. A row of saltbags filled with sand had also been piled against the balustrade, while the gleaming rifles in the room also suggested that Weland did not consider it advisable to confine his trust entirely to the Sapolto Ju-Ju.

"I wonder if the boy I sent up the bank has crawled back again or gone to sleep," he said.

"You can generally count on a nigger being asleep whenever there's a special reason why he shouldn't be," said Blower. "They are born like that, and they can't help it. Still, the bushmen could scarcely get ashore without our hearing them. Of course they will come down sooner or later."

"I think it will be later. A good many of them believe in the Ju-Ju, and there's very little doubt that old Kwaka will not throw a chance away."

Blower smiled grimly. "He'll scarcely find the factory an easy nut to crack. It was practically one man who held the verandah at Akassa against several hundred bushmen, while two or three of the boys here shoot quite decently. Kwaka will leave us until he can afford to face a loss, and try something easier first—the Arkana men's big village or the Mission."

Weland said nothing, and the men lay silent, with their

thoughts. Then Blower, leaning forward suddenly, touched Weland's arm.

"The boy is asleep," he said. "Can't you hear it?"

Weland sat still and listened, and for a moment only heard the soft gurgle of the river and the heavy splashing on the leaves. Then another sound, which grew into a slow, persistent thudding, crept out of the silence. It was not, however, what he had expected.

"One paddle!" he said. "It's weeks now since a bushman has come down the creek alone. He seems anxious to get here."

Then, when there was no particular need of the warning, a cry rose out of the blackness. "Canoe lib!"

The men on the verandah sat still until there were voices beside the bank and a patter of feet that crossed the compound towards the house. Then two dusky figures came up the stairway, and Blower rose suddenly.

"A woman!" he said. "A white woman!"

Weland was on his feet in a moment, and as a dusky man came gasping into the verandah laid his hand reassuringly on the arm of the woman who followed him. He felt that she was trembling.

"Take the boy away, Blower, and don't let the rest hear what he has to tell," he said sharply. "Come in, madam."

He led the woman into the room, shut the door, and flung the lattice to. She sank limply into a chair, and lay there silently looking up at him. Her thin dress hung about her rent with thorns, her face was drawn and bloodless, and her fingers quivering, but there was a curious hard brightness in her eyes.

"I wonder if you would let me stay here a little. I wouldn't have asked you only I've nowhere else to go," she said. "Anyway, you couldn't turn me out to-night."

"Of course!" he said, as unconcerned as he could. "That is, until we can contrive to send you back to Konnoto."

The woman leaned forward in her chair, and then, as though her strength failed her, laid a quivering hand upon the table.

"I can never go back," she said. "They would kill me."

Just then Blower came in and stared hard at both of them. "The boy's tolerably used up, and doesn't seem to have had much to eat for two or three days," he said. "He's a Kroo, as it happens, but I couldn't make very much sense out of what he told me, except that he left Konnoto because he was afraid of his life."

Weland raised his hand. "I think Mrs. Konnoto will tell us about it in a minute or two."

Addy Konnoto straightened herself with an effort. "I'll tell you now," she said. "One of you must start to-night and warn them at the Mission. I don't mind what becomes of me, but I couldn't stay there and do nothing while they killed white people. Nobody at home ever thought much of me—and Konnoto was as kind as he dared to be until lately—but I'm white."

She stopped with a gasp and Weland nodded.

"Of course!" he said soothingly. "Why must we warn them at the Mission?"

"Kwaka is going to burn it down and kill everybody there. I am sure of it, but I'm not going to tell you how I found it out. Still, I want you to remember that my husband doesn't know."

"Of course!" said Weland again. "You would have some little trouble in getting away."

Addy Konnoto shivered. "Yes," she said. "It was horribly difficult. A number of boys were to go and join Kwaka. The Ju-Ju man arranged it—my husband was away—but I knew they would guess what I meant to do if I left Konnoto before they went. For awhile I couldn't even make up my mind to go. It wasn't my business—the people at the coast had been horrid to me, and I could seldom get enough to eat in England. Then I remembered that Kwaka would kill the white

people at the Mission, and, after all, I am white, you see. Well, I persuaded the boy to run away with me. He was afraid of the Ju-Ju men, and nobody liked him because he came from another country. We daren't take a canoe from Konnoto because that would show them which way we were going, and we were two days and nights in the bush before we got one from an Arkana man. We had scarcely anything to eat. It was horrible."

Once more Weland regarded her compassionately. She was still quivering a little, and he now noticed a discoloured bruise upon her forehead. She had told him that Konnoto had been kind to her, but he fancied he knew the mark of a clenched fist.

"Do you know when Kwaka meant to start?" he asked.

"I think as soon as the boys got to his village," said Addy. "It was Monday afternoon when they left Konnoto, and as soon as it was dark enough I came away. It was the Ju-Ju man who took them. I told you my husband knew nothing about it. He was away."

Weland glanced at Blower, who smiled incredulously.

"Then if I come across your husband shall I tell him you are here?" he said.

"No," she said. "You must not tell him anything. Can't you see that I can never go back again? There can be nothing any more between Konnoto and me."

Weland made no answer. Addy Konnoto, it seemed, realized what the result of her decision must be, and he could think of nothing that appeared appropriate to say. Turning silently he drew Blower aside.

"Tell the boy to get her something to eat, and straighten up a room for her," he said. "Then talk to her for a little or persuade her to lie down. I'll be waiting for you in the office in half an hour."

Blower did as he was bidden, and then entering the little office found Weland, who now wore boots and stout leggings, and was girt with a bandolier, writing at

a desk. He went on for a minute or two, and then handed Blower two envelopes.

"One is for the Company, and the other for Tommy Ormond. You will send them on if a week passes and you have no news of me," he said. "In the meanwhile you will do what you can for Mrs. Konnoto. I'm not sure that I shall be able to get one or two policemen to take a canoe down river, and it would scarcely be safe to send her without them."

"Where do you expect to get them from?"

"The outpost."

"Hadn't you better let me go instead of you?"

"You don't know the bush paths as I do. It would take you twice as long to get through."

"Still, can't you grasp the fact that you're practically asking Tommy Ormond to arrest you?"

Weland smiled curiously. "It will probably amount to that, but I shall not in any case be doing as much as Mrs. Konnoto has done already. Mrs. Halifax will have gone down river, but I'm not quite sure that Mrs. Joynson has gone with her, while Joynson and Leslie Ormond will, I think, have stayed at the Mission. Tommy will realize the necessity of meeting Kwaka there."

"Then why can't you give him that letter yourself?"

"I may never get through. If the bushmen are coming down the paths will be watched."

Blower appeared reflective. "Well," he said, "it seems to me you have got to take your chances, but there's a point you don't appear to have remembered. What am I to do?"

"I fancied you realized that Kwaka isn't likely to worry about Sapolto, just now!" said Weland, dryly.

Blower made a little gesture. "I wasn't exactly thinking of that risk," he said. "My princely salary as book-keeper is supposed to cover everything. It's Mrs. Konnoto, I don't like to be left alone with her. I'm afraid of a woman who'd marry a nigger."

Weland smiled grimly. "I don't think you need be.

Nobody would venture to call you an especially attractive man, and she only wants to be left alone just now."

"Then there's the Company to consider. The bushmen would turn this place inside out if her husband came down to ask for her when you were away, and I wouldn't let him have her."

"The Company," said Weland, dryly, "will have to take the risk. They have made a good deal of money out of this country, and can't expect to have everything."

Neither was addicted to any unnecessary display of feeling, but they had faced peril and fever together and realized that it was, at least, likely they would never see each other again, and Blower's fingers trembled a little as he grasped his comrade's hand.

"I think you owe me quite enough to keep clear of any foolishness that's not absolutely necessary. I'd be lonely without you."

Weland said nothing, but went out into the darkness and Blower spent several minutes in frothing up a cocktail. When he laid the jug down he made a little gesture of resignation.

"I am," he said, "worse than lonely now. Still one has to be civil."

He went back to the living-room and knocked at the door. A voice bade him come in, and he stood very straight in front of the woman with his big hat in his hand.

"You will consider this room and those two yonder yours while you are here, madam," he said.

Addy Konnoto glanced at the doors he pointed to. "I really don't want so many," she said. "Where will you go?"

"I will live out on the verandah, and in the big salt shed," said Blower, decisively. "There's plenty of room for me."

He went out, and in the midst of her weariness and anxiety Addy Konnoto leaned back in her chair and

laughed. The laughter, however, grew harsh and meaningless, and was broken by little moans and gasps.

XXV

A HEAVY BURDEN

DARKNESS was not far away, though as yet one long level ray that cast a track of brightness across the compound streamed in through the open door of the outpost where Lieutenant Ormond sat. He had been too busy of late floundering through the bush from village to village to examine his prisoner, but he had at last found an opportunity and sat, portentously solemn, at a little table. Sergeant Samadu stood beside him, with eyes fixed sternly on a big dusky man who was evidently very far from feeling at ease.

"The trouble," said Tommy, "is that this fellow is evidently very much afraid of the Ju-Ju men, and from what I know about them I don't blame him. They, of course, made up the story he has just told us, and I think almost anybody would believe it, especially if they hadn't any more sense than Langley has. It's so devilishly like the thing. Tell him I don't believe one word of what he said, and I'll hang him if he tries to take me in again. Now, I want to know, one time, where he was taking those rifles to."

The sergeant, who seemed to comprehend at least the drift of this, took care to impress the fact that he was in a distinctly unpleasant position upon the prisoner before he repeated the question, but, as Tommy half expected, the answer was the same.

"We boy lib for Sapolto factory, sah."

Tommy made a little gesture of resignation. "I really think you'll have to get that whip," he said. "The hide one with the sharp edges. He's nice and plump, and they'd cut well into him. We could hang him afterwards."

He surmised from what he saw in the negro's face that he understood English tolerably well, and expected that the sight of the whip would prove sufficient. Just then, however, there was a shout outside, and a murmur of voices, while the sergeant, who glanced out through the doorway, shook his head.

"More dam bushman lib!" he said.

Tommy made a little gesture of disgust. "It seems as if I was never to get the truth out of this fellow," he said. "Now, may I be hanged if it isn't a white man!"

He stopped abruptly, and a man who appeared in the doorway said, "Cappy Weland lib!"

Next moment Weland came in, gasping, spattered with mire, and flushed with haste, and flung himself into the nearest chair. He lay there silent for a moment or two, and Tommy stared at him.

"You are about the last person I expected," he said dryly. "Any way, you have saved me going up to Sapolto after you."

Weland stopped him with a lifted hand. "Never mind that, you can arrest me afterwards. Kwaka's out at last. He's marching on the Mission now!"

Tommy was on his feet in an instant, and turned to the sergeant, "Take that man away," he said. "Those two fellows with the guinea worm can look after him, and the one with the dysentery will have to stay with them. Get every other man under arms, bandoliers full, and as many rounds as they can carry with two days' rations. We'll march in ten minutes."

The sergeant went out with his prisoner, the shrill notes of a bugle rang through the shadows, for the sun ray had faded and night was closing down, and Weland said quietly, "I'm coming with you, Tommy."

"Very well, but it is, under the circumstances, a somewhat unusual position for two men who, I think, owe each other a little to find themselves in," said Tommy. "Still, we needn't worry about that just now. Let me have your story."

Weland told it concisely, and Tommy appeared reflective.

"It isn't what any one would consider an especially encouraging state of affairs," he said. "There's the Major, who ought to be rushing a column up, looking for leopards Heaven knows where, and I've got you and a handful of policemen to put down a big rebellion with, while the whole country will be in a blaze if I make a mess of it."

"I'm thankful Mrs. Halifax and Miss Gaskell, at least, will have gone down river."

Tommy shook his head. "I'm very much afraid they haven't," he said. "You see, they were to wait for the Major, and when I went back to the place where I'd left him I found he'd gone on further into the bush. There was nothing to show where he was heading for."

Weland was on his feet in an instant, with horror in his face.

"Good Lord!" he said, "Millicent is there still?"

Tommy looked at him very gravely, for in that moment he understood.

"Yes," he said grimly, "I'm afraid she is. As it happens, most unfortunately, Mrs. Halifax and Mrs. Joynson are there too."

Weland leaned forward and seized his comrade by the shoulder. "Why are you standing there? Your men are falling in."

Lieutenant Ormond was not the man to waste a minute when there was work to be done, but he went out even more quickly than he had purposed doing, for next moment Weland propelled him by main force to the door. It was almost dark when they stood in the compound, but while Weland fumed his comrade moved slowly up and down the ranks of waiting men. Here and there he took a rifle from one of them and pressed down the lever, or drew out a man and turned him round while he ran his eye over his bandolier. Tommy could move

as quickly as most people, but he knew that undue haste is not advisable.

"Well," he said quietly, "I think we're ready. Tenshun comp'ny. Slope arms. Left turn. March!"

There was a rattle and jingle, a patter of feet, and the men swung out the compound file by file, while when they plunged into the forest Weland groaned as he remembered the waste of swamp and forest that lay between them and the Mission.

"Every man who shows distress must be left behind to-night. I'm afraid to realize how much depends upon our speed," he said.

Tommy noticed the strange hoarseness in his comrade's voice; and, perhaps because he was also sensible of the same fierce impatience, quietly ran his eye along as much as he could see of the line of flitting shadows.

"Not quite so fast, sergeant! They can't keep that pace up, and we don't want to break them at the start," he said. "Pull yourself together, Weland. Considering what is in front of us we have got to keep our heads, and the complaint you are evidently troubled with is apt to spread."

Weland made no answer, but he knew that Tommy was right, for it was evident that nobody could run all the way from there to the Mission, as he longed to do. Speed was essential, but for that reason there must be no waste of effort. This became more apparent when the red sunrise flamed across the forest and found the men still pressing onward through the shadowy aisles, but the march they made is yet remembered with wonder by men acquainted with the region they journeyed through. One or two dropped out by the way, but with lips set and every muscle strained to the limit that flesh and blood can bear, the rest held on, and still two haggard white men with grim drawn faces, who would long remember that supreme effort, kept pace with them.

In the meanwhile it happened that Leslie Ormond went up river in search of news. He had done so some-

what frequently of late, and the information he acquired from the bushmen he met had not diminished his anxiety. He also found the village he had made the object of his journey silent and deserted, while articles of some value to the bushmen had been left behind in the huts, which was especially significant. Then a canoe with two men paddling desperately and one or two more crouching apparently wounded under the mat roof, went by, and as its occupants seemed unwilling to stop a moment to answer his questions he decided that it was advisable to waste no time in getting back to the Mission.

It was dark when he reached it, and it occurred to him that the place was curiously silent. A light or two burned in the house, but there were no cooking fires in the compound, and no sound rose from the converts' huts, which he could scarce see, for the night was black and steamy. Leslie also fancied it was desirable to keep the canoe boys in front of him, where he could keep his eyes on them as he crossed the compound. He felt that they might be wanted, and they were already showing signs of apprehension, while he knew that the African is apt to disappear into the forest with almost astonishing celerity when peril approaches. Their naked feet, however, made very little sound, and he had almost reached the house without attracting attention when a figure rose into the light that shone out from a window.

Leslie recognized the man as one whose orthodoxy he had grave doubts about. He had come down to the Mission a long while ago, broken in health and crippled by the guinea worm, and when Joynson had done what he could for him remained there and charged himself with the cleaning of the lamps. His skin was lighter in colour than that of the converts, and there was, in spite of his infirmities, a pride and fierceness about him which suggested that he had been born in the land of the Moslem. Leslie was astonished to notice that he carried a rifle.

"Where are the boys?" he said.

The man laughed scornfully and pointed towards the

forest. "They have gone," he said. "Every one of them. There came two wounded bushmen in a canoe begging for food an hour ago, and the unbelievers went. I who am old and crippled am here alone with the white men."

Leslie closed one hand, for this was bitter news to him.

"Where did you get the rifle?" he asked.

The old man smiled grimly. "From one of the bushmen. He was very sick, and it was no use to him. It is a good gun. One could send many heathen to the pit with it."

"Give it me," said Leslie, sternly.

The man stood motionless. "I have done the white men's bidding, and perhaps I may serve them still to-night, but it will not be in their way," he said. "I was of the bodyguard of an Emir who feared Allah in the dry lands of the north, and I think it is written that before the sun is up to-morrow I shall once more smite the heathen."

Ormond did not press the point. He saw that it would be useless, and turned to the boys.

"See that they do not go away without my leave," he said.

The man pointed to the door of the storeroom, which formed part of the space enclosed beneath the house.

"Go in there, dogs of unbelievers, and beware! The man who comes out before he is told dies," he said.

The boys were probably as astonished as Ormond was at the change in the man who had long unobtrusively swept out the rooms of the Mission House and trimmed the lamps, but they evidently considered it advisable to go into the store, while Ormond went up the stairway and met Joynson, who had heard their voices on the verandah.

"We have been anxious about you, Leslie. Our time of affliction has come," he said.

"I have heard," said Ormond, "All the rest are safe?"

"They are waiting for you," said Joynson. "The women must go down river. I could not send them earlier—except for the boys you had with you there is nobody here."

Ormond said nothing further until he entered the lighted room where the women sat. They were silent, and there was a strained expression in their eyes, but that was the only sign of the tension they felt. Mrs. Halifax and Millicent were dressed for a journey. Ormond glanced at them sharply and was reassured.

"You must go down river at once," he said. "Mr. Joynson will go with you."

Joynson made a little gesture. "And you?"

"I shall stay here," said Ormond, quietly.

"Then I will stay with you."

Ormond shook his head. "I think not," he said. "I am responsible for the station, and a very lonely man, for which I am thankful now. You have a wife, and there are two others committed to your care. We cannot—it is painful to admit it—trust them to the canoe boys. It is necessary, Hammond, that you should go."

Joynson said nothing for a moment or two, though it was at least as evident to him that it would not be advisable to confide three defenceless women to the canoe boys just then.

"Then," he said, "if it must be so, I will get ready. Still, Leslie, I once more beg you to come with us. It is a horrible risk you run."

Ormond smiled again, very gravely. "Time is precious, and I have made my decision," he said. "I do not think in any case my life would be a long one."

Millicent, who had been watching him, wondered at his face. There was no fear in it, which she had, indeed, scarcely expected, but it bore a curious expression of content. Then Mrs. Halifax touched her arm and she rose.

They went out into the verandah, and while the man with the rifle brought out the canoe boys and went with

them to the river the rest shook hands with Ormond on the stairway. There are times when speech is ineffective, and very little was said. "Good-bye. A fortunate journey!" from Joynson. "The Lord keep you safe!" from his wife; and those who were going down river melted into the darkness.

Then Leslie Ormond turned towards the little church, and lighting the candles on the altar flung himself upon his knees before it, for his dark hour had come.

XXVI

THE LAST STRUGGLE

THE canoe was ready for the journey, and the boys evidently anxious to get away, when Mrs. Halifax discovered that she had left a trinket she set some store by behind. She said it did not greatly matter, but Joynson, who was not sure that she meant it, stood up in the canoe, and listened as he turned his face up river. No sound that he could hear came out of the darkness.

"I think I remember seeing the case," said Millicent. "I will run back for it."

Joynson glanced about him and listened again.

"Be as quick as you can!" he said.

Millicent sprang ashore, and the boys' murmurs grew louder when she disappeared. They were evidently very much afraid, and when a minute or two had passed one of them, who stood up, called out sharply.

"Bushman lib!" he said.

There was a moment's silence, and then Joynson shouted as a rhythmic thud and splash came faintly down river. There was no answer from the compound, but the sound grew louder, and one of the boys thrust the canoe out while his comrades dipped their paddles.

"Stop!" said Joynson. "Stop one time."

The boys plied the paddles faster, and Joynson seized the nearest of them by the arm when the canoe swung

out into the stream. There was a brief scuffle, and then Mrs. Halifax gasped, while her companion rose in the swaying craft as a dark figure swung a paddle over her husband's head. It came down with a thud, the canoe lurched violently, and while Mrs. Halifax screamed Joynson fell heavily at his wife's feet. Then the boys dipped the paddles again, and the canoe slid forward into the darkness.

Mrs. Halifax, pulling herself together, offered the boys cloth enough to start them as traders, but their one thought was to get away from the coming peril, and the sound of paddles behind them was growing louder. Still, the little lady implored and promised, until a big shadowy craft swept out of the gloom, and a man who apparently recognized the Mission canoe raised his voice.

"Plenty too much bushman lib," he said.

It was evident that the men in the canoe were also fugitives, but the Mission boys showed no sign of relaxing their efforts, and Mrs. Halifax turned to her companion as she realized that nothing she could say was likely to have the least effect upon them.

"It is horrible—but what can we do? Have they hurt him very much?" she gasped.

Mrs. Joynson shook her head. "We can do nothing whatever," she said. "I think he is only stunned."

In the meanwhile Millicent stood quivering in the compound, listening to the thud of paddles which grew rapidly fainter, until she realized at last that her companions were not coming back for her. Then she closed her hands and stared at the darkness with a gasp of horror. It appeared to close in upon and overwhelm her, until, turning a little, she saw that a dim light streamed out from the windows of the church. It was, however, almost a minute before she could attach any meaning to the fact, though she made her way towards the faint brightness in a dazed fashion, and then it was with a vast relief she remembered that Leslie Ormond would be there and she was not quite alone.

"They have gone away and left me," she said. "I came back for a ring Mrs. Halifax had forgotten, and when I reached the river again there was no canoe."

Ormond braced himself to face the position with an effort, and, partly because he dare not reveal its effect upon him, proceeded to vindicate his comrade.

"I think the boys must have run away with them," he said. "They were evidently badly frightened, and Brother Hammond would never have gone without you purposely."

"No," said Millicent, with a little tremble in her voice, though she tried to smile. "Of course not! Still, I don't think there is any use in wondering why they didn't wait. That doesn't matter in the least."

Ormond closed one hand hard, for it was evident that she was right. Nothing was of any consequence then beyond the fact that he was alone with the woman he loved, while death drew swiftly nearer both of them.

"Come," he said almost harshly, "we will go to the house. You might be able to hide yourself there."

They crossed the compound and went up the stairway in silence, but Millicent laid her hand upon the man's arm when they reached the verandah.

"I'm afraid of the darkness inside," she said. "Mayn't I stay out here? It will not be quite so hard to face if I have you beside me."

Ormond said nothing, but drew forward a basket chair, and leaned against a pillar near it, where the light from the window fell clear of him, for he did not wish the girl to see his face.

He did not know how long he stood there silent, but at last the splash of paddles once more came out of the darkness and swelled into a loud, persistent thudding.

"They are coming," he said very quietly. "You must go in."

Millicent clutched his arm again and clung to him

trembling. "Let me stay with you," she said. "I shall not be so much afraid when you are near."

Acting upon impulse he took the girl's hand and held it fast, while she remembered afterwards that his fingers were icy cold.

In the meanwhile the canoes came on, until Millicent heard them crash together as they slid in to the landing. Then there was a soft clatter, and a confused murmur of voices, followed by a patter of feet in the compound. It grew louder until she felt that a host of men must be creeping in upon them through the darkness below. She set her lips tight and held Leslie Ormond's hand, until he drew it gently away, and moved a few paces to the head of the stairway, where the light from the window fell upon him. His tall, commanding figure showed faintly white in it.

For a minute or two his voice rang clearly, and Millicent fancied that his warnings had some effect upon the men below. Then someone answered him derisively there was a roar of cruel laughter, and unseen men swarmed about the foot of the stairway. Ormond seized her shoulder and drew her back into the gloom, where she clung to his arm again.

"Is there no hope?" she said.

The man moved a little so that she could see his face, which showed drawn and grey in the dim light, but she fancied there was a smile in it.

"One still remains to us," he said solemnly. "I look for the resurrection of the dead——"

At that moment there was a crash on the roof above their heads, and a man who screamed went down among his comrades' feet. Two of them fell over him, there was a stoppage and a struggle, and a crash on the roof again, while another man who stood a pace or two in front of the rest reeled backwards and plunged into the press. A great voice came out of the darkness above.

"In the name of Allah! Death to the unbelieving dogs," it said. Next moment there was a sudden

scramble, and save for two dusky forms that moved and moaned a little, the stairway was empty.

"Come down!" said Leslie Ormond sternly.

The man above made no answer for a moment or two, and Millicent heard the clack of a rifle breech snapped to. Then a voice was raised in a Northern tongue.

"Here are still ten cartridges. When there are no more left I come," it said. "I served the Emir, the scourge of the unbelievers."

Leslie Ormond had decided that resistance by which he could gain nothing was inadmissible, but he realized that the dusky man was beyond his control.

He said nothing further, and turned to the girl when there was a flash in the compound and a ringing upon the iron roof. More pale red streaks broke out here and there, and Millicent screamed, while Ormond felt the sleeve of his jacket grow soaked and warm. Then there was a splash upon his hand, and remembering nothing of the risk they ran he dragged the girl into the light of the window. Her light dress was already splashed with flecks of red, and he saw that she was very white, and her lips were quivering.

"My arm above the elbow! It is stinging horribly," she said.

Ormond knew a little surgery, and surmised that the artery was not cut, though the white flesh had been cruelly torn, apparently by a piece of ragged potleg. In another moment or two he had bound his handkerchief about the wound, and then drew the girl back behind one of the wooden pillars, but the sight of that crimson laceration and bespattered dress had an effect on him that only one or two of those who knew him best could have anticipated. It is, however, possible that it was partly the effect of the nervous strain he had borne, for white men who tax their strength too heavily in that country are apt to break down with astonishing suddenness. In any case, while Leslie Ormond had felt a few minutes earlier that resistance which could only

result in further bloodshed would be counted an offence in him, he now seized Mrs. Joyson's lounge chair with both hands and swung it high above his head. It fell in pieces when it struck the balustrade, and he laughed harshly as he tore a tough piece of American hickory out of the wreck. It had a slight curve in it, and swung with a nice balance, while the man was tall and his arms were long. Then he took his place a yard or two back from the head of the stairway, where there was no pillar in his way.

In the meanwhile Millicent, standing with every perception quickened and nerve strung to almost unendurable tension, fancied she heard another splash of paddles from the misty river. They seemed to be plied furiously, but the sound was lost in a rush of feet, and she saw the bushmen were coming up the stairway. They were half-way up it, and the iron rang upon the roof while their comrades in the compound fired above their heads, when the deadly rifle flashed once, and a wounded man barred their passage.

The bushmen were, however, still coming up and as a fourth man fell back among them those who scrambled over him blundered into the wreckage of the chair. It apparently brought two of them down, and Millicent heard the portentous clack of the rifle breech through the uproar. The smoke drifted a little more thickly into the verandah, and the squibbing and flashing of bad powder grew faster in the compound below, when there was a sudden slipping and scrambling on the roof, and a wild figure fell from the darkness into the verandah. The roof did not project quite so far as the balustrade, and Millicent saw the lamp-trimmer stand a moment in the stream of light. He was almost naked, his dusky chest was smeared and splashed, and part of his face had been torn away. She shivered at the sight of it, but could not turn her eyes aside. Twice he cried in a great harsh voice, calling on the Prophet, as Leslie Ormond knew, and then plunged down with lifted rifle

into the struggling mob below. It broke up before him and closed in again, Millicent caught the gleam of daggers and saw the rifle butt swung up. Men shouted, and gasped, and scuffled, and then the mob surged on up the steps again.

Leslie Ormond staggered, dropped the bar, and the mob poured into the verandah.

Then Millicent screamed and fled through the open door behind her. There was a lamp in the corridor, and as she ran down it she heard a tramp of feet on the inner stairway, which the bushmen had apparently not been aware of hitherto. She turned again, uncertain where to fly to now, and stood still, gasping and trembling, until a red tarbouche appeared above the balustrade and a man in uniform sprang into sight. A white man with a very grim face, whom she scarcely recognized as Tommy Ormond, rushed past him, and when she staggered into a doorway running figures in uniform were flitting down the corridor. A voice she recognized rang out, and the building quivered with the blast of rifles. It was repeated, there was a crash of firing in the compound, which she knew was not the squibbing of flintlock guns, a clamour of shouts and screams, and through it all she heard the voice of trader Weland. Then the uproar grew less distinct, and she lay, half-sensible of where she was or what was going on, in a chair she did not remember having flung herself into, until a man strode into the room. He held a smoking rifle in one blackened hand, his face was drawn and grim, and his duck garments hung in tatters about him. But she would have known him in any guise, and stretched out her hands to him. "Derrick!" she said.

The man stood still, gasping. "Thank Heaven!" he said hoarsely. "Where are the rest?"

"Down river," said the girl, looking up at him with shining eyes. "Derrick!"

Then Weland dropped the rifle, and taking both her hands stooped and kissed her on the lips. Millicent

laughed softly and drew him down until he fell on one knee beside her chair.

"Keep me safe, dear," she said. "I was horribly afraid, but nothing matters now."

Weland was ragged, miry, and powder-grimed, but he wound one arm about her, and then drew it back and suddenly straightened himself.

"They have shot you!" he said.

Millicent smiled, and laid her hand upon his shoulder. "It stings, but nothing more," she said. "I scarcely remembered it. Leslie tied it up for me."

Then she thrust the man a trifle away from her. "Oh!" she said, "where is Leslie?"

Weland, who recognized that expostulation would be useless then, made a little gesture of resignation, and they went out together. They came upon Leslie Ormond, lying very still at the head of the stairway, and when Weland flung the lattice farther open the light from the window fell upon his face. It was the colour of ashes, but his eyes were open.

"Millicent," he said, "She is safe?"

"Yes," said Weland, hoarsely, "she is here."

Ormond strove to raise his head, and let it fall back again, but Weland signed to the girl, who slipped softly forward and bent over him.

"Safe," he said faintly. "Quitesafe. Mrs. Joynson too."

Millicent was never quite sure why she did it, but there was a curious strained look in his eyes which were fixed upon her, and she dropped on one knee, and stooping farther kissed him on the forehead. Then she strove to speak and failed, while the man looked at her with a little smile in his eyes. Weland laid his hand upon her arm, and she rose obediently, and moved away when he pointed to the door.

"Are there any messages I can send?" he said, turning to the wounded man again.

Ormond's eyes were half-closed now, and his lips had fallen apart, but he made a very faint gesture.

"A lonely man—and a failure—but perhaps I have cleared the way for better men," he said. "My wife may be living—and there is blood upon my hands too. The land is red with it."

Weland, who saw what was happening, said nothing at all, and Leslie Ormond, who gasped once or twice, raised his forefinger to his forehead.

"In hoc signo——" he said, and stopped.

It was ten minutes later when Weland rose stiffly to his feet and took off his wide sun-hat, but another hour had passed when Tommy Ormond came up the stairway flushed and ragged.

"I'm only four men short, but I think we've smashed them flat," he said. "They're bolting for their lives now through the bush. There has evidently been grim work here. The women are all right?"

"Mrs. Joynson and Mrs. Halifax are on their way down river with Joynson. Millicent is in the room behind us."

"And Leslie?"

Weland laid a hand upon his arm. "Leslie is here. If there is advancement on merit in his service, he got his step an hour ago."

XXVII

MILLICENT PERSISTS

A FEW lights blinked faintly in the darkness that shrouded the river down which the steam launch slid when Tommy Ormond laid his hand on a lever.

"We'll be there in about ten minutes, and I quite expect you'll find Mrs. Halifax and the others at the village, Millicent," he said. "You will be perfectly safe there until I can send back the launch for you. Weland, you will, of course, come on with me. In the meanwhile I had better make sure of the channel."

He vanished into the gloom beyond the little funnel, and Millicent turned to Weland, who sat opposite her in the cockpit.

"I shall have to leave you, Derrick, in a minute or two," she said.

"I must ask you to forgive me if you can," he said.

"Forgive you?" asked Millicent, softly.

"Yes. The relief I felt when I found you safe at the Mission was too much for me, and I lost my head. That is my one excuse."

"Then you think excuses are necessary?"

Weland's voice was quite still, but it was slightly hoarse. "Can't you understand?" he said. "I am a prisoner, a disgraced man, and, even if I had not been, isn't there sufficient to hold you apart from me?"

Millicent looked at him steadily.

"You wish to make me remember what is due to me? Well, I will do so," she said. "Unless you can give me a more convincing excuse I shall go back to the settlement almost hating you and despising myself."

Weland stood up and leaned against the coaming, looking down on her. "I think you are right," he said. "I should have told you, but was it very astonishing I should remember that except for Tommy Ormond's consideration I should now have had the irons on my wrists? I felt it would be more seemly to wait until—if it ever happened—I was proved innocent. That was, I realize now, another offence. I was remembering only what was due to myself."

Presently Weland resumed quietly: "From the night I saw your picture in the outpost I cherished the hope of meeting you, and when I saw you at Halton I knew I loved you. It, of course, seemed out of the question that you would ever feel for me what I did for you, but when I met you again in Africa a little hope crept into my heart. It is the improbable that most frequently happens in this land, and all my life I had grappled with difficulties. That was why I ran risks at Sapolto and

made what others considered rash ventures in trade. They succeeded beyond my expectations, and little by little my hope grew stronger."

"And you gave up that hope?" said Millicent, softly.

"It was torn away from me. They branded me as a criminal and I tried to harden myself to face what must result from it. It was a bitter struggle and when I came upon you that night at the Mission human nature was too strong for me. There is nothing more to say."

"Derrick, you have told me nothing new. I think I understood you long ago, and whenever you ask me I shall be ready to come to you."

Weland's control deserted him. They had gone so far that there could be no stopping now, and disregarding the Kroo boy at the helm he drew the girl towards him and felt every nerve in his body thrill as a warm soft arm slid round his neck. Then there was a patter of feet on deck, and Tommy, who appeared to make a quite unnecessary noise, stepped into the cockpit.

Millicent smiled at him. "I expect your congratulations, Tommy," she said.

"I am inclined to fancy the congratulations are due to me," said Weland.

Tommy's eyes twinkled in the light of the lantern. "Well," he said, "that is one of the points you can decide between yourselves by and by. In the meanwhile, although Derrick didn't apparently consider it necessary to lay his case before me, I have a somewhat unpleasant feeling that I'm incurring no small responsibility. I presume you quite know what you're doing?"

"Of course!" said Millicent. "You know that Derrick will be proved innocent."

Tommy chuckled. "I have a reason that nobody else is acquainted with for believing it rather more than likely."

"Then I am glad he and I have come to an understanding—now."

Tommy smiled curiously. "Of course, I see the point," he said. "It's what one would have expected of you. Well, since I was never quite a match for either of you single, if it is of any use to you, you have my benediction."

Then he shouted to the men forward, and shut the steam off as the launch slid in to the landing. In another minute Millicent was being embraced by Mrs. Halifax.

"A boy stunned Joynson with a paddle and they wouldn't go back for you. I felt it horribly, and now I can't quite express my relief," she said. "We are quite safe and comfortable here, but you will have so much to tell me."

In the meanwhile the launch was speeding on down river, and Weland, who sat where the light of the engine lantern fell upon him, looked his companion steadily in the face.

"I don't know what you'll think of me, Tommy," he said. "I know I should have waited."

"I'm not quite sure there's a great deal to be gained by thinking anything," said Tommy, dryly. "I'll tell you this instead. If I'd ever had time to waste on falling in love you would not have had Millicent now, and she'd have made me a colonel in another ten years. In the meanwhile I've more important affairs to consider. Kwaka will be heading back to his swamps to recover, and I've got to make the headman realize the necessity of sending up at least two or three companies."

Tommy handed his prisoner over when he reached Government House, and while Weland was placed in detention hastened back up river and prowled along the verge of Kwaka's swamps with his policemen until Major Halifax came up with two or three somewhat attenuated companies of black troops.

Their task was, however, difficult. No white man then living had, so far as it was known, been permitted to enter the headman's stronghold, and such bushmen as

were acquainted with the way in were evidently either inside the stockade under his command or determined not to reveal it. It was believed that the town stood on a tract of drier soil amidst a quaking swamp, and one morning the little battalion moved forward. Two companies were landed on a strip of slightly drier soil with a little quick-firing gun, and bidden to make their way as nearly as possible in a certain direction, while the rest went on up a very muddy creek with a steam launch clanking in front of the canoes.

"I don't like that bend ahead," said Major Halifax, who stood on the launch's deck. "There'll be a shoal off the entrant spit, and the current will swing us in under the opposite bank. It would be just the place for the niggers to plant a gun, and if there was any ground firm enough to bear them I'd land a section on it to investigate. As it is, there isn't."

"It's not my business," said Langley. "Still, I should like to point out that we must—ah—risk a trifle."

Halifax smiled dryly. "It seems to me that we are risking a good deal already, though I scarcely think it can be helped," he said. "We have been up here a week and done nothing yet, while the niggers are getting more impudent every day. Still, it's a very likely place for the bushmen to plant a gun. What do you think, Ormond?"

"That is the one reason I should have for believing there wasn't one there, sir. They very seldom do what anybody would expect them to do," said Tommy.

The launch steamed on, and it grew even hotter than before. The creek was dazzling to look upon, white deck and glinting metal bewildered the vision, and already a white man lay gasping in one of the canocs, when the steamer stopped suddenly with a jerk that shook Langley off his feet.

Halifax blinked at the forst. "Now," he said, "what the devil does that mean? Tell them to give her steam."

"Hard astern, with your permission, sir," said Ormond. "It's a boom they've pulled under. Have I your leave——"

He got no further, for there was a long pale flash amidst the undergrowth, a stunning detonation, and a great cloud of yellow smoke swept out of the forest, while the launch shook and rattled, and shrill cries went up. Then she lurched down on one side, and the vapour rolled about her. Major Halifax's voice rang hoarsely through the confusion.

"Full speed at the bank!" he said. "Allen, keep back your company. Come in and support me, Padget."

A very frightened negro pulled the tiller over, the sinking launch swung round a trifle, and with deck slanting farther and engine clanking full speed ran into the bank. Then there was a second flash in the undergrowth, a crash, and a roar of steam, and the men went up the bank and plunged into the smoke. They could see very little but dim trunks of trees in the yellow haze; ropes of creepers caught and tripped them, and some stuck fast in thorny thickets. Then there was a further flashing amidst the trunks, and the forest seemed alive with whirring potleg. Still Halifax's voice rang through the crash of firing, the men straggled into formation and floundered forward in open order, while twice the crash of a volley drowned the squibbing of the flintlocks. Then there was a sudden silence until a shouting broke out as a section blundered almost waist-deep into a morass. A bugle rang shrilly, and the men stood still, gazing about them, for the smoke had cleared a trifle and there was no sign of a bushman.

"It seems worse on the other flank," said the Major. "It has cost us five or six men, anyway, and we haven't seen a nigger. Where have the devils got to? What do you think, Ormond? You know the country."

"An advance would be inadvisable, sir," said Tommy. "If there had been any ground we could have man-

œuvred on they wouldn't have put the guns here. Of course they brought them down by water."

"Well," he said, "we'll roll the guns into the creek and try ahead in the canoes. The launch is done for any-way."

They went back and found two old cast-iron cannon, besides a few kegs of powder, and a bag filled with lumps of iron cooking pot, which they flung into the stream. Then they picked up their wounded and four or five dead, and pushed on again. They also spent several hours paddling into miry waterways under an intolerable heat, without finding a yard of soil that troops could land on, while now and then a crash of firing rang across the bush. At last the Major gave an order, and they went down stream again, and found three or four very muddy and disgusted white officers, and a mob of black troops in tattered uniform, waiting them. One of the white officers, who appeared a trifle flushed in face, saluted Major Halifax.

"We made a mile or so with difficulty, sir," he said. "Then we came to a bog there was apparently no getting through, and the bushmen crawled in on our flank. They made very bad practice with the rifles they evidently had, but we were under a cross fire, and I considered it advisable to get back to drier land. There was no sign of a path anywhere, and all hope of getting into touch with you had gone. I am sorry to report, sir, that we had to leave the gun. You will see what the attempt to get it out cost us by the hammocks there."

The Major smiled very grimly. "If it's any consolation to you, I left the launch," he said. "There are a few feet of her forward above water, and I scarcely think she'll float again. Get your men into the canoes and we'll go back to camp."

They reached it, dejected and weary, and when an hour or two had passed, Tommy Ormond, who served as intelligence department, was summoned to Major Halifax's tent. Three or four other officers were already there,

and when Tommy came in Langley was on his feet.

"I must confine myself to my own province, but that permits me to point out that it is essential to—ah—crush King Kwaka without further delay," he said.

Halifax laughed a trifle harshly. "The necessity of crushing him is quite apparent," he said. "Even black troops can't live here long, and Chesters already reports two or three cases of dysentery. The one question is, How the devil it's to be done?"

Halifax swung round towards Ormond. "Can you go any further than the rest?"

"I can, at least, make a suggestion, sir," said Tommy, reflectively. "There is a white man in this colony who has been close up to Kwaka's place, and his partner, who told him exactly how the path led, was certainly there once or twice, at least. I fancy, if he was willing, he could take us in."

"I don't quite understand you," said Halifax, dryly. "You seemed to imply that he might not be willing."

"Well," said Tommy, "I scarcely think the colony could expect too much from him. I am, you see, sir, referring to trader Weland."

There was a somewhat curious silence, and then an officer stood up. "I believe, sir, that if we can secure his goodwill that man would be invaluable to us now," he said. "Whether he knows the exact path or not, there is no one in the colony so well acquainted with the country."

"Then you will go down and bring him up, Ormond," said Halifax. "Write him a note to the headman, Langley. Can't you promise him an amnesty for any offence?"

Tommy turned to the Major with a little smile. "If I might suggest it, sir, that wouldn't be the least use," he said. "In fact, it would probably decide him not to come. Now, if you will leave the affair to my discretion?"

The Major, who glanced at Langley, nodded. "Do whatever you think advisable, but bring him here," he said.

XXVIII

MILLICENT GAINS HER POINT

THERE was dazzling sunlight outside, but the sea breeze brought an invigorating freshness into the room of Government House where trader Weland stood by an open window. A black sentry with glinting rifle paced up and down the verandah beneath it, and beyond the dusty compound the bush rolled, green and shadowy, up the slope of a hill, until it broke off in a fringe of feathery palm-tufts that cut sharply against the blueness of the sky. There was a narrow gap between them where the road crossed the divide, and Weland set his lips tight when his eyes fell upon it.

That road led to the shadowy land where the strength of the colony was then arrayed against King Kwaka, and he who had long foreseen that struggle and expected to bear a leading part in it was a prisoner. He had been treated with a consideration he scarcely expected, but no one had apparently desired or been permitted to visit him, while the black soldier who brought his food in would tell him nothing of what was going on. Nor had he any news of Millicent, though he felt certain she had, at least, endeavoured to communicate with him.

He knew now that she loved him, but it was evident that unless the charge made against him could be disproved there would be an insurmountable barrier between them, for he realized that it was almost hopeless to expect anybody else to believe in his innocence. Then a fit of anger against Langley and the Administration shook him, and he paced up and down the room with savage strides, until a black soldier flung the door open. He stood still suddenly as the headman came in.

"This is an unexpected mark of consideration, sir," he said dryly.

The headman smiled a little. "I could, of course, have sent an orderly for you," he said. "Still, you see, I didn't. To go a little further, have you anything to complain of?"

"Not in one respect. You could have sent me to the town jail among the niggers, and have made me put up with a good many other kinds of unpleasantness, which I had quite expected. But you have kept me here without even a trial, and destroyed my prospects in the colony. I think that is sufficient."

"I do not know that we are altogether to be blamed," said the headman. "Commissioner Langley has your case in hand, but he has been obliged to postpone it by affairs of much greater importance. I am afraid you must, like most of the rest of us, put up with a little inconvenience just now."

"I scarcely think you came here to impress that point on me," said Weland. "It is unnecessary to state that I am quite at your service, since the fact is evident."

"Will you sit down?" he said. "I wonder if you could, for the time being, overlook the fact that you are a prisoner?"

"It would be a trifle difficult, sir. What would you wish me to consider myself?"

The headman made a little deprecatory gesture. "An Englishman," he said. "The colony is, as you are quite aware, menaced by a very serious crisis. It is unnecessary to tell you that unless King Kwaka is speedily crushed we shall have every tribe on the northern frontier down on us."

"I quite realize that. Indeed, I once endeavoured to warn you that it would become so. The question is how it affects me?"

The headman looked at him steadily. "It seems to me a trifle unnecessary. The answer should be evident to any man who recognizes that he owes a good deal to his nation."

"One would fancy there was also an obligation on the

nation," said Weland. "An Englishman is entitled to a fair trial, which has not been granted me. In place of it I have apparently been condemned unheard."

The headman sat thoughtfully silent a moment or two. "You believe you could make your innocence evident?"

"No," said Weland, dryly, "I scarcely think I could. That is, not unless I had a free hand for a month or two to look for the testimony I want in the bush country, which is, of course, out of the question now."

Again the headman regarded him in silence for a while. "Then your attitude is not especially comprehensible. We must find a way into King Kwaka's swamps, and I have been told you know one. I have come to ask you to act as guide."

"Would it be advisable of you to trust me? It is evident that I could lead the troops into a morass where they would be at Kwaka's mercy."

The headman smiled grimly. "Has it occurred to you that such a proceeding would be a trifle risky? We will, however, let that point pass. You have admitted that you would find it difficult to establish your innocence, and I have a considerable discretion allowed me."

Weland laughed harshly. "I want no favours, and least of all a pardon for an offence I have not committed."

The headman looked at him curiously. "You are a trifle difficult to understand."

"Too plausible—and inconsistent?" said Weland.

The headman made a little gesture. "I prefer to reserve my opinion. I have pointed out how you would benefit by doing as we wished, but there is another aspect of the question. You no doubt realize that prisoners are not usually given quarters in Government House."

Weland understood the hint, for no abasement could well exceed that of a white man penned up with half-naked negroes in the common jail, or toiling in their

company on the roads. His face flushed a trifle, and the hard glitter showed more plainly in his eyes.

"I fancy you are exercising rather less than your usual discretion now, sir," he said.

The headman rose. "I am doing what I consider my duty, and I have spent a good deal of time here already," he said. "Am I to understand that you have no intention of doing what is plainly yours?"

Weland smiled. "I may give you an answer to-morrow. I want time for consideration."

The headman regarded him with expressionless eyes, and then went out without a word, while Weland once more paced up and down the room.

It was two hours later, and he was sitting still moody, when the door was opened and he sprang to his feet as Millicent came in.

"I wonder if you know what I have come for?" she said.

Weland's face grew almost grim for a moment, but he laughed the next. "Of course!" he said. "I needn't tell you how I appreciate it."

Millicent shook her head and held herself a little apart from him. "No," she said. "The purpose that brought me is scarcely so likely to appeal to your vanity, though I really was a little anxious to see you. I would have come before, but Mrs. Halifax couldn't get me permission."

"She knows?" said Weland.

The warm colour swept into Millicent's cheeks. "Of course! She said she knew she ought to feel very angry with both of us, but she was not quite sure that she did. She also wished you to know that she would have come herself this afternoon if she hadn't been certain that it was better to leave the affair to me."

"That was why the headman gave you permission. He, in fact, sent you?"

The girl loosed his hands and sat down.

"He did not send me. If he had, anxious as I was

to see you, I do not think I would have come," she said. "Still, I think he knows my purpose. I made a bargain with you, Derrick, but I don't wish to press that point now. There was a time when you had the Imperial view."

Weland his hand on her shoulder: "I begin to doubt whether I ever had it," he said. "Can't you realize what a burden the Administration of this colony has laid on you and me? If I could make you take it I would give you back your liberty."

Millicent smiled at him bravely. "Still, you can't," she said.

"Then isn't it evident that you will have to bear a great deal on my account. I cannot marry you with a stain of this kind upon me, and I think I understand how difficult your position will be."

Again Millicent smiled at him. "I don't want to be spared anything, dear," she said. "Still, are we not getting away from the point?"

"I don't think so. I wanted you to realize how little we owe the colony."

"What we owe! Isn't that too much the trader's point of view? It implies that one expects value beforehand. Do you always ask for cash down, Derrick?"

The man laughed a trifle bitterly. "Would it be astonishing if I did? You and the bushmen are the only people who have ever given me credit."

"Then you shall have unlimited credit now. I believe that you will, in spite of all that has been done to you, help the Administration out of the difficulty, not because you owe them anything, but because you are Derrick Weland—and the man I have chosen."

Weland made her a little inclination. "I made you a promise, and I am ready," he said.

Millicent smiled curiously and shook her head. "No," she said. "Before I am contented you must go a little farther still."

The man's face grew very grim again for a moment, and the girl knew what he was thinking.

"My dear," he said, "there is a point of view beyond even the Imperial one. I mean the one taught at Opponotax, but I am afraid I can't attain to it just now. Still, I will take the troops in because there will be very little trade done up yonder until King Kwaka is put down, among other reasons."

Millicent laid her hand upon his arm and drew him down. "You have a strong will, but you are very honest, dear," she said.

Ten minutes later a black soldier knocked at the door, and the girl looked at Weland, who turned to the man.

"If the headman is in just now tell him I would like to see him," he said.

The man made a sign of comprehension, and as she went out with him Millicent flashed a swift glance of approbation at Weland. Half an hour had passed when the headman came in.

"I had expected to wait until to-morrow," he said, with a little dry smile.

"If you would prefer it there is still no reason why you shouldn't."

The headman made a little gesture. "I almost think you would have done us efficient service as a Commissioner," he said. "This is of consequence, as you are quite aware."

Weland laughed. "Then I shall be ready to start for the swamps as soon as you can get a hammock train ready, sir."

"And you make no conditions about the amnesty?"

"As I think I told you, I do not want it."

The headman went out, but when the hammock boys and a handful of black soldiers waited outside Government House as darkness closed down, he stood smiling upon the verandah while Mrs. Halifax and Millicent shook hands with Weland. Then as the boys took up the poles he approached the hammock.

"I hope you have no objections to shaking hands with me, Mr. Weland," he said. "In any case, it is scarcely necessary to say that my good wishes go with you."

Weland took the proffered hand, an order was given, there was a tramp of feet and a jingling, and the hammock boys swung away, while when they had vanished into the darkness the headman turned to Mrs. Halifax.

"I remember that you once constituted yourself that man's advocate," he said. "You appeared to have what was then a somewhat astonishing confidence in him."

"I had," said the little lady. "As it happens, I have it still."

The headman smiled at her. "Well," he said, "I am almost inclined to fancy that he really is a badly-treated man."

The headman turned to Millicent. "I think we shall owe you a good deal, Miss Gaskell," he said. "A certain rumour has reached me lately."

"If it is to the effect that I had promised to marry Mr. Weland, it is quite correct," said the girl, with a faint ring in her voice.

The headman made her a little inclination. "Then," he said, "trader Weland is a fortunate man. Still, in that case, I do not understand why he would not entertain a suggestion I made him this morning. I intimated that in the event of his doing us a certain service we might be disposed to avoid causing him any further unpleasantness."

"Did you expect for a moment that he would be influenced by an offer of the kind, or willing to take favour from you?" she said. "I am almost astonished that you were not afraid he would mislead your troops."

The headman glanced at her with a little smile. "It appeared almost likely considering what he stood to gain," he said. "In regard to the other suggestion, I really think, my dear young lady, that we could have sufficient confidence in the man you and Mrs. Halifax so firmly believe in."

XXIX

A RISKY UNDERTAKING

LIEUTENANT ORMOND, who had come in softly, stood still a moment in the little tent and glanced at Major Halifax, who sat, intent in face, upon a provision case.

"I have found the path exactly where we were told it was, sir," he said. "I proceeded along it with some difficulty until it forked on the edge of a swamp."

Halifax glanced at the paper in his hand. "The forking and the swamp are both marked here, gentlemen, though if we hadn't Mr. Weland to supply its deficiencies nobody could make head or tail of the thing," he said. "I think we are warranted in trusting to the correctness of his memory, but it is a big responsibility, and if you have any suggestions to make I am willing to consider them."

There were several white officers in the tent, and they looked at each other in silence for almost a minute. It was pitched in a glade of drier forest on the confines of Kwaka's swamps, and they were waiting for the moon to sink before they set out on what they knew would be a very perilous march.

Weland, who had joined them a few hours earlier, understood their thoughts, but he sat watching them with a little sardonic smile and said nothing.

It was Langley who broke the silence first. "From what Lieutenant Ormond has discovered it seems to me that Kwaka has no difficulty in getting provisions in," he said. "Unless we can crush him at once we shall have to ask for white troops and a grant from the Imperial funds, which would, it is evident, give rise to—ah—a good deal of unpleasantness."

One or two of the men smiled, for that was Langley and the headman's business, and Captain Padget turned to the Major.

"I scarcely fancy there is anything to be gained by

discussing that point," he said. "The one question is: Does trader Weland feel quite sure he can take us in? A great deal depends on it."

Halifax glanced at Weland, who smiled a trifle dryly.

"I have told you so once already, and am not in the habit of repeating my assurances," he said. "Though I have never been quite so far as Kwaka's stockade, I was once very near it when I was sent back again, while Custine, my late comrade, was in several times and told me how to find the way. He insisted on my making a record of it, for he foresaw that sooner or later Kwaka or the agent at Sapolto must go down."

"Custine died there?" said Langley.

"He did," said Weland, grimly. "That was King Kwaka's doing, and Custine bequeathed the quarrel to me. I intend to make no protestations, but, if you have sufficient confidence in me, I believe it will be decided once for all to-night."

"It's a somewhat astonishing story, but this is an astonishing country," said one man, reflectively. "A fetich man told Kwaka that he would never be secure while the agent at Sapolto kept the Ju-Ju."

Weland smiled curiously, and Halifax turned to him. "We are getting away from the point," he said. "You mentioned two ways in, and we have decided to take the more difficult one by land. You still feel tolerably certain that Kwaka would expect us to come by the other?"

"I do," said Weland, dryly. "You owe that to Commissioner Langley. Kwaka hears most of what goes on, and no doubt laughed in his sleeve when he was told you had imprisoned the one man who could take you in. That is why you must march to-night, because once he hears I have come back he will have both ways watched and enfiladed with guns."

"Which would probably be disastrous to the leading company," said Langley. "Suppose he has—ah—heard you are here already?"

"You have got to take the risk," said Weland quietly.

It was about an hour later when the black soldiers rose in shadowy ranks from the undergrowth. There was no clamour of orders, only a low word here and there, and with a soft patter of feet they were on their way while the glade they had camped in grew empty. There was a brief halt when they reached the canoes, and then they crept up the misty river for an hour at least until somebody called out softly and the craft slid in to the bank. There the long column wound away into the forest down a quaggy trail.

It was scarcely two feet wide, and the bush closed in upon it, black and steamy, and save for the splashing of moisture impressively still. Here and there a wisp of sour white mist drifted athwart the plodding men, but Ormond's policemen held on steadily at the head of the line, and Weland marched a pace or two in front of them.

He stopped and held his hand up when the path forked abruptly, and a confused murmur of voices ran back along the line which drew out further; then there was a splashing and floundering as the men plunged into the swamp. The cane rose about them flinty hard, and ten feet high, the morass which bubbled beneath their feet reeked with foul emanations, and the blackness was thickened by drifting steam, but leaving rags of their uniform behind them they made their way through it, and came out, gasping and bemired, into drier bush again. Weland stood still on the edge of the quagmire and turned to Tommy Ormond, whom he could dimly see.

"It is fortunate there are not many bushmen about," he said. "Tell the Major to let them come up in the old formation."

Tommy laughed as he listened to the men the mist hid floundering. "One would be enough," he said. "He could scarcely help hearing them splashing two miles away."

He swung round and vanished into the mist, while when he came back he was chuckling softly.

"I've seen Mr. Commissioner Langley, and it was almost worth while coming up here for. He had two or three files scraping him," he said.

He signed to the dusky sergeant, and the column moved on again. It was very dark and very hot, while the stagnant air was heavy with steam, and the silence and the tension commenced to have their effect upon the men. Sections closed in on one another, and there was a narrowing of the gaps between the companies, while the officers fumed at each stoppage or swung round with hand on holster at every unusual sound. Then they went splashing waist deep through a creek, and when the leading company halted Tommy Ormond floundered back along the line until he came upon Major Halifax.

"Weland believes we are close upon the stockade and may get into touch with the bushmen at any moment," he said. "He considers it advisable to go forward alone and reconnoitre."

Halifax stood silent a moment or two. "Well," he said slowly, "let him go. Still, send a couple of men you can trust after him."

Tommy saluted, and said nothing, though he guessed the cause of the unusual harshness in the Major's voice, while as he moved away a word softly given and the men sank down amidst the undergrowth.

In the meanwhile Weland had disappeared into the bush. He was accustomed to the country, and made very little sound, but the two men Tommy sent after him made none at all, and there was a deep impressive stillness while the column waited. Nothing moved in the forest, only great drops of moisture splashed upon the leaves, but that silence was hard to bear, and there were white officers who remembered the strain. They were sufficiently acquainted with the bushman's methods to realize that they might at any moment blunder into a horrible trap and go down without even seeing a man to fire at. It seemed even probable that their guide had gone on to prepare it, while it was evident to every

man in the column that if any mischance happened to him nobody could extricate them from those quagmires until daylight. Major Halifax became affected by the growing uneasiness, and walked forward until he reached the place where Ormond stood.

"You feel quite sure Weland can be relied upon?" he said.

"I'd stake my life on it, sir," said Tommy. "Still, I sent on the men as you told me."

Just then there was a soft swish of leaves, and a shadowy object rose out of the bush so close to them that Tommy's hand was on his pistol when the black sergeant touched his arm. He laughed softly as he said, "Dam fine white man too much. Cappy Weland lib!"

Weland appeared to recognize Halifax. "I have found the stockade," he said. "It fronts the road to the creek by which they'd expect any visitors of our kind to come, and there shouldn't be much difficulty in getting in behind it. I think they've a good many guns there, and I could see their watch-fires burning."

"Then we'll move at once," said Halifax. "What about those two men of yours, Ormond? They've not come back."

Weland swung round on Ormond. "You sent a couple of men to watch me?"

"I did," said Tommy, quietly.

"It was my order," said Halifax. "Lieutenant Ormond is not responsible. I'll make any reparation you consider necessary once we're in."

"I might have expected it," he said, and his words stung those who heard him like the lash of a whip. "It is quite in keeping with the rest, but that does not concern us now. There is a gun not far away I want to work you round, and you had better let the policemen and the leading company come on as they are with me until you see the stockade. Then you will be in open ground and can adopt any formation that appears convenient. If I may make a suggestion, it would be

advisable to fling as many men as you can upon the stockade before the niggers quite realize what is happening. We will, I expect, come in upon the flank of it, and if the policemen are allowed to act independently I believe I could put them in a position to seize any gun the bushmen may make an attempt at traversing."

Halifax laid a hand on his shoulder and gripped it hard. "It shall be done," he said. "I'm trusting you with the life of every man in this column."

He swung round, and in another minute a murmur of orders ran along the line. The men rose on the instant, there was a rattle and jingle of steel, a soft tramp of feet that splashed in mire, and the column moved on again.

Suddenly the policemen swung sharply to the right, and there was a crackle of undergrowth as they left the trail. They, however, quickened their pace, and as section by section the men passed into the bush a shouting rose out of the shadows and was followed by the roll of a great skin drum. Then Weland's voice rang sharply through the growing din.

"To the right!" he said. "Keep your distance, Captain Padget. We'll want room to take front in."

Then there was a long flash amidst the undergrowth, a stunning detonation, and a great whirring as half a bushel of broken cast-iron crashed into the forest a few yards clear of the leading men. Halifax's voice rose in the momentary silence that followed and Ormond's policemen sprang forward a few yards behind the flying gunners. Then the head of the column, breaking out into the open, swung wide to the right, and the orders rang in hoarse confusion. There was a red glow of fire-light close in front of them, and cutting athwart it the serrated line of a big stockade. They were, it was evident, behind it, for Kwaka had expected them to come by another road, but the red light showed dusky forms clustered about one gun partly turned in their direction. Ormond, as it happened, saw what they were doing.

"We've got to have that gun," he said.

He sprang forward, with Sergeant Samadu and Weland at his heels, and the policemen breaking into faster stride. A swarm of dusky figures were apparently busy with wedges and handspikes about the gun, and one stood with hand raised, a little apart from them, while the flickering glare of the watch-fire showed another stooping near the breech with a glowing brand. Tommy gasped as he ran. "If they can pinch her round a foot or two we're done."

That was tolerably evident, for while friction tubes and time fuses are unknown to the bushmen a torch laid upon the priming serves as well, and, at close distances, a bang of broken cast-iron makes a very effective substitute for shrapnel. Still, the dusky artillerymen had evidently a difficulty in getting the deadly muzzle far enough round, and Ormond's handful of men sped on with bayonets twinkling, while those behind her held their breath as they watched them. Weland in the meanwhile recognized the man who was directing operations, for the firelight was on his face, and though he no longer wore any approach to civilized dress his features were those of Konnoto.

In another few seconds they came upon the gun, and the man at the breech went down as Tommy's pistol flashed. There was a patter of firing along the stockade and Konnoto's voice rose stridently. Weland saw him for a moment swinging a great rammer, and Ormond swerve to avoid the stroke. Then the latter's pistol flashed, and the policemen drove through the mob as the big dusky man went down.

That was sufficient for the bushmen. It was clearly out of the question that they could traverse more of the guns before the oncoming company fell upon them, and they bolted incontinently. Behind them the bugles were ringing, and there was a portentous gleam of bayonets in the red light of the fires. Tommy laughed exultantly as he said, "If the Major has sense enough to come on now we'll sweep the town."

XXX

THE DEPOSITION OF KWAKA

THE denizen of the swamps can fight fiercely enough in his own fashion, which, however, generally consists in lying in wait for, or creeping in upon, an unsuspecting adversary, and had Major Halifax come by the way he was expected it would have cost him a good many men to drive those who defended it from the stockade. As it happened, King Kwaka's retainers had been surprised themselves, and did not like it, but handfuls of them stood their ground, while Konnoto's men poured out with rifles into the avenue behind them.

Exactly what was going on in the village was not apparent to the troops or the men who led them, for black darkness shrouded it, but there was no mistaking the whirr of the bullets that buried themselves in the moist soil or flew overhead, and it was evident that the affair might become serious after all. The flashes were growing more frequent, and the crash of firing louder, but the sound of flying feet was much less distinct, as Captain Padget, who was rather closer to the village than any of his comrades, noticed. He had then part at least of his company behind him, though, since precision of manœuvring is not always attainable in that country, he could have told nobody what had become of the rest, while he was not very much astonished when Major Halifax, whom he had supposed to be in quite another place, came up with him. The Major apparently recognized him.

"How the devil have you got here?" he said. "Who has taken the liberty of changing our formation?"

A bullet whirred past between them, and there was a cry as a man behind went down, while Halifax clutched Padget's shoulder.

"Are these troops or a mob?" he said. "I'll break

the men responsible. Good Lord, are the leading company and the supports going in together? Where—is—that bugler?"

Nobody seemed to know. In fact, it is probable that very few of the black soldiers could have told where their officers were. The crash of firing and the policemen's shouts had drowned Weland's warning when they had driven the bushmen out of the stockade, and a good many of the troops had plunged into a creek before they were aware that there was one in the vicinity.

Then from out of the darkness in front of them there came a crash of rifles, sharp and simultaneous, and very unlike the desultory firing of the bushmen.

"I'll break the man who gave that order," said the Major. "Stop that damned sergeant yonder. Make him keep his distance. Are those files he's leading acting independently of the company?"

If he said anything else it was drowned by a fresh burst of firing, from the bushmen now, and it was never quite decided who gave the order in question, or whether anybody gave it at all. There are occasions when white troops get a little out of hand, and rather more depends upon the non-commissioned officers' quickness of wit than their commander's carefully-conceived dispositions, while one cannot make the African into more than he was meant to be by any amount of drill. Thus it happened that part of Tommy Ormond's policemen finding the potleg flying more briskly than they cared about, apparently without instructions, occupied a grove of trees and swept the huts with a volley. Some of the black soldiers did much the same thing, and Konnoto's men, who gave back before the hail of lead, ran for shelter to the huts. They at least had rifles, but when handled by clumsy fingers the Martini is occasionally apt to tear off the cartridge rim in place of throwing out the empty shell, while it is not intended to be loaded by the muzzle, which it became evident afterwards some of the dusky riflemen had attempted to do.

As a result their fire grew as slack as it was ineffective, and Tommy Ormond beat his policemen out from among the trees, and stood still a moment looking about him. He could just see the huts in front of him and hear the tramp of feet behind.

"I can't quite remember what the exact plan of these operations is, and I'm not sure anybody else does," he said to Weland, who was at his side. "Still, it seems to me the most important thing is to keep the devils on the run."

They went on with a shout, and it seemed that Major Halifax, who had at last come upon a bugler, had arrived at the same decision, for a shrill clangour rose out of the darkness behind them, and the tramp of running feet grew a trifle quicker. Then they were in the native town, and those of Kwaka's retainers who had lingered among the huts went down. There was little firing now, for the Martini butt met the bayonet until groups of beaten men fled before the steel, and Ormond handed Sergeant Samadu a matchbox he had carefully kept dry for a special service.

In another few moments a sheet of flame rose crackling from the nearest thatch, and as the dusky policemen swarmed about the huts the head of the second company swept by. Their black faces showed up plainly in the growing glare, there was a flash of steel, and while the tramp of feet rang louder among the huts rows of shadowy figures came up apparently endlessly out of the gloom behind.

That, it seemed, was sufficient for the bushmen. Their guns were unloaded, many of them had dropped ramrods or powder horns, and more than a few of the riflemen could not induce a spent cartridge to come out of the chamber or close the sliding block on a new one. Only one course remained to them, and they adopted it expeditiously, flinging away their weapons as they ran. They were also not encumbered by trappings as the troops were, for with them a waist-cloth served as uni-

form, which accounted for the fact that neither policeman nor black soldier could equal them at speed. It was now a pursuit and not a struggle, but few of the white men who took part in it afterwards remembered exactly what they did, while Weland, who had made a long journey before the march began, retained only a fragmentary recollection.

He ran, as did the others, with Tommy Ormond close beside him, and the glare of the burning huts growing brighter behind. Already it streamed far down the broad avenue, and showed the last of the mob of fugitives flitting on in front. Bushman and black soldier gasped and ran, but the clamour ahead grew a trifle fainter and the patter of flying feet less distinct as they swept out of the red glare and plunged into the gloom again, until Tommy with difficulty pulled some, at least, of his policemen up on the edge of the forest. Then the ringing of the bugles once more rose shrill and exultant, and the troops who came up stopped, gasping. King Kwaka's rule was over, and the power of the fetich hierarchy was broken.

Tommy Ormond heaved a big sigh of content. "I don't think it has cost us anything worth mentioning," he said. "It's the first important affair of the kind the Major has handled in this country, though he has been some years here, and he might have made a good deal worse attempt at it."

"Are you quite sure that anybody handled it?" said Weland.

Tommy laughed. "Of course," he said. "Wait until the official account is issued if you don't believe it. A daringly laid scheme of operations carried out brilliantly. Langley and the Major held up as deliverers of a blood-stained country, and laurels showered upon the battalion officers. I don't know that the policemen will get any, but I scarcely fancy that will worry them. No doubt they'll find something a good deal more useful themselves."

"Where are they?" said Weland. "I can't see more than half of those you started with."

"I don't know," said Tommy. "There are times when I never ask questions, though I have my suspicions. The bushmen cleared out in a hurry, and there are odds and ends worth collecting in these places, while it's astonishing how much a man can stow away inside a tunic. If we gave them tight-fitting ones we wouldn't keep a company. Now I think we had better go and see how Padget's getting on. He was to seize the palace in accordance with the strict plan of operations, but it's quite likely he's now trying to induce a bushman to tell him where it is."

He signed to the sergeant, and they turned away, and came upon Major Halifax a few minutes later. He was standing in the avenue with two or three officers about him, and, for a good many huts were burning, there was light enough to show that very few policemen marched with Ormond now.

"Where are the rest of your men?" he said.

"Searching the huts, sir," said Tommy, truthfully. "If they discover anything of importance I will report immediately."

The Major smiled a trifle dryly. "I fancy it will depend upon the size of it," he said. "Have you seen anything of Commissioner Langley?"

"I think I did, sir. He was in the creek—apparently swimming. Still, that was some little time ago, and he has, no doubt, got out by now. It occurred to me that I might be of some service to Captain Padget at the palace."

The Major glanced at the others and saw a little smile in their eyes. "He will probably appreciate your thoughtfulness," he said. "There are several others who would not be sorry to be the man who seized King Kwaka. Still, you are acquainted with these places. I will not detain you."

Tommy saluted, and five minutes later stopped out-

side a big, rambling, mud-built house, on the verandah of which Captain Padget was talking to another white officer. He smiled at Tommy affably.

"It's unfortunate you didn't come a trifle earlier," he said. "I've got our man, and was just sending Branscombe to report it."

"You will, at least, let me have a look at him," said Tommy.

Padget led them into a big earth-floored room where a figure sat huddled on a kind of rammed soil bed. It was swathed in sumptuous coloured stuffs, and freely bedecked with gold, but Ormond smiled when he had glanced at the dusky face.

"I think," he said softly, "you have been victimized."

Padget flushed hotly and looked at Weland, who nodded. "Tommy is right," he said. "That is certainly not the man."

"I understood that no white man now in the colony had seen him."

"Custine did," said Weland. "He told me tolerably often what he was like. Besides, any one could tell a king of Kwaka's kind from the ordinary bushman. If you are still doubtful, tell that man to strip the cloth piece from the impostor's breast."

The dusky soldier did as he was bidden, and Weland smiled as he glanced at the tattooing.

"Kwaka doesn't load himself with gold and decorative trappings," he said. "He is proud, and it isn't necessary. His warrant of sovereignty fits him a good deal more closely."

Tommy was almost at the door by this time, but he swung round a moment. "You have a few files watching the back?" he said.

Padget nodded. "Yes—we haven't been through the place yet," he said. "I'll leave it to you, Ormond. Make your own dispositions."

Tommy was back in two minutes with four policemen, one of whom carried a palm-oil lamp. "If he is still

inside it's quite certain that he can't get out," he said. "Come along—it's your due—Weland."

They prowled through the big rambling building and finally tore down a beautifully-woven screen drawn across a door. The white men went in together, and Weland smiled curiously when the policeman held up the lamp. A tall old man with a face that was light in colour slowly rose and looked at them steadily. He was dressed in plain white cotton, but he carried himself with dignity that even the policemen recognized.

Weland turned to Padget. "I have," he said, "the pleasure of presenting you to Headman Kwaka. If you had not sent those files to watch the back of the house no white man would ever have seen him."

The negro made a little proud gesture. "Yes," he said in the bush tongue, "I am Headman Kwaka."

It was half an hour later when the troops swung into square in the wide space before the palace, and the roll was called. Weland, who stood beside Tommy, fancied that several of the policemen answered more than once, and that a good many of them appeared suspiciously bulky, but that was not his business, and Ormond did not seem to notice it. There were few names not answered to among the rest, and when the patter of voices had died away Major Halifax raised his hand in the middle of the square. He was a trifle ragged, and somewhat muddy, but it passed almost unnoticed by comparison with the state of his companion.

African creeks are miry, and the one Ormond had left Commissioner Langley swimming in was certainly not more limpid than the rest. He had also previously fallen into a swamp, and his thin civil attire, from which the water still dripped, clung about his slightly portly frame in a ludicrous fashion.

"We have, I think, done a thing worth remembering to-night," said Major Halifax, who was not an orator. "Opened up a new field for the traders to make money in, and saved no end of bushmen from getting their

throats cut. What is as much to the purpose, it hasn't cost us by any means so much as it might have done, and very few of the bushmen have been wiped out either, which will simplify the affair for Commissioner Langley. I think the result is due to the excellent spirit of the men, the resolution of those who led them, and most of all to the scheme of operations. There were shortcomings in respect to the preservation of formation which I may point out at another time, but I think I can assure you that what you have done will be appreciated. There is one man we, however, owe a good deal to. I mean the man who brought us in."

There was a little murmur, and then Commissioner Langley straightened himself.

"Standing here in place of the Administration I offer you my thanks on behalf of the colony, gentlemen," he said. "I needn't point out to you what the result of this success will be. Your commander has—ah—done it efficiently already, but I venture to suggest that even your intrepidity might have availed the colony less had it not been for the services of trader Weland. He has, I think, done more for the colony than we who direct its affairs and have evidently been misled concerning him were—ah—entitled to expect."

Then there was a shouting of orders, and the square broke up, while, as the troops swung away, Langley walked up to where Weland was standing and held out his hand.

"Every man is liable to—ah—make mistakes," he said. "What I did was done as a servant of the colony. That is the only excuse for me."

Weland shook hands with him, though he smiled a little as he said, "I haven't cleared myself yet."

"No," said Tommy, who had left Sergeant Samadu with his policemen. "Still, it's going to be done for you very shortly."

No more was said, but it was sufficient, and there was

concord between the men as they walked towards the verandah of the big house where Major Halifax had gone to receive Kwaka's submission. It was offered him in very unequivocal terms, for the fallen ruler, standing very straight in front of them, smiled grimly at the Major as he signed to his interpreter.

"If you had come the way I had expected you I would have killed you all," he said, and then pointed to Weland. "It is not my fault that you are not dead now. That man saved you. I have never seen him, but my servants have told me so much about him that I would have been sure of him anywhere. His Ju-Ju is a great one, but if it had not been I would have driven every white man out of the bush country. Now you will do what you wish with me."

Major Halifax smiled a little as he glanced at Langley.

"The old rascal is, at least, a king," he said.

Langley nodded. "I rather think his observations are correct in one respect," he said. "That Ju-Ju man's prediction has—ah—come true, Mr. Weland."

XXXI

ACQUITTED

THE palm fronds were rustling in the sea-breeze, and the snapping flags formed patches of glowing colour in the dazzling light, when Millicent Gaskell stood amidst an assembly of the leading inhabitants of the settlement on the verandah of Government House, looking down with a sparkle in her eyes at the expectant crowd. Ranks of men with rifles kept clear a wide space of dusty sand, but a dark mass of exuberant humanity pressed upon them, and flowed back between the white houses up the road that climbed the hillside. Over the girl's head the crosses of the Union streamed on the breeze, and the crimson ensign tossed from every staff above the strag-

gling town, while strings of bunting fluttered, coloured specks, from the masts of the steamers in the harbour.

That settlement lived by commerce, and, with the exception of those who served the Government, every white man there had but one purpose, to acquire a competence as rapidly as he could contrive and then retire to a country where he would have a better chance of living to spend it ; but its trade had been hampered by the fact that the fear of the Ju-Ju lay heavily upon the land of swamp and forest from which the produce came down. The bushman is not at any time a remarkably industrious person, and the probability that he might be made away with before he had converted the fruits of his labour into salt, or cloth, or gin, had naturally not formed an incentive to continuous effort.

At last, however, the fetich potentate had ventured too far, and the hands that had been raised in admonition had reached out and sternly pulled him down. King Kwaka's rule was over, the shadow of fear had been lifted from the land, and every man in the seaboard settlements knew that a way to prosperity had been opened to him. Trader and dusky porter would benefit equally, and they had come out to welcome back the men who had done so much for them. It was known that Major Halifax's column had halted beyond the divide the previous night, and already eyes were turned expectantly towards the gap in the dusky foliage where the road crossed the crest of the hill.

"No sign of them yet!" said Millicent. "Surely they can't be far away—we seem to have been hours here already."

Joynson, who sat behind her with his wife, looked up as she turned round. "One, I believe!" he said. "It is to be hoped they will be here in time for lunch."

Millicent laughed, a clear, ringing laugh which had, however, a suggestion of astonishment in it. "You can remember your lunch just now?" she said.

Joynson's eyes twinkled, while the girl's face softened

as she saw the big scar upon his forehead and remembered how he had come by it.

"I confess that I find no especial difficulty in doing so," he said. "I may, however, point out that I am not quite so young as you are, and that owing to the unwillingness of any of the boys to cook it in their somewhat exuberant condition, we had a very indifferent breakfast. They are, I understand, famous for their curried prawns at Government House."

He stopped abruptly as a man whose approach he had not noticed turned to him. He was little and spare and haggard, but there was command in his face, and the men on the verandah had made way for him with deference. It was not very often that a trader or missionary was received at Government House, but now it was evident that the headman meant to show Joynson special attention.

"We are a trifle proud of our prawns, and I hope you will find them up to our usual standard," he said. "I have, however, not yet had the pleasure of being presented to Mrs. Joynson."

A trace of colour crept into the climate-worn lady's cheeks, for she knew that recognition would have its effect upon the married officers' wives, who had never shown themselves especially friendly, which was naturally a gratification. The headman looked at her with a very kindly expression as he sat down at her side.

"I feel we owe you and your husband a good deal, madam," he said. "I am pleased to have an opportunity of assuring you of our appreciation of what you have done for the colony."

"I am afraid we have very little to show for our labours," she said. "No more than a partly ruined station and a row of empty huts."

"Well," answered the headman, "I can't help feeling that in due time the results will appear as well, even if we are not here to see them. This is a very old country and one that changes slowly, but in the case of the

Opponotax Mission the results are in one respect evident now. The fact that you kept it open had a moral effect upon the wavering bushmen that was worth a good deal to us. They, I quite believe, decided that Kwaka was not after all very much to be dreaded when two or three lonely white folks showed no fear of him. Then, had it not been for the very gallant defence of the verandah it is more than probable that Lieutenant Ormond would have been quite unable to stop King Kwaka's seaward march."

"It cost us a very precious life."

The headman made her a little inclination. "I cannot believe you would grudge it to the colony, madam," he said. "That struggle probably cost Kwaka his kingdom, and Leslie Ormond could not have served his Church or his nation better than he did that night."

Joynson looked up. "He is beyond our commendation now, but we have the living with us still," he said. "There are two people who, it seems to me, are entitled to expect some consideration from the colony, and one is trader Weland."

"Trader Weland will probably receive it," said the headman, with a little dry smile. "I may say that his affairs have had our attention for some little time."

"Then there is Mrs. Konnoto. The book-keeper from Sapolto, as you perhaps know, brought her to the bush village where we found shelter, and I felt it incumbent on me to say what I can in her favour. She cut herself adrift from her husband when she brought down the warning, and but for that Kwaka would have been almost in sight of the coast before you could have dispatched your troops. Now she is left destitute."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

Joynson appeared a trifle embarrassed under the headman's gaze. "She has one or two friends who are willing to do what they can for her, but she insists on going back to England."

"I think nobody would doubt those friends' willing-

ness, but it did not seem to me quite fitting that they should be saddled with the burden," he said. "I have seen Mrs. Konnoto, whom I sent for this morning, and I may say that the colony recognizes its responsibility. She will, in fact, receive an allowance sufficient to maintain her in what I fancy she considers affluence, out of her husband's sequestered possessions."

He moved away, and there was a murmur from the crowd as the notes of the bugles came faintly down from the crest of the hill. The murmur grew louder, the mob surged and swayed, and a great shout went up. "They're coming. Soldier man he lib!"

Then Millicent set her lips, and felt a little quiver run through her as there came winding down through the gap in the foliage a glistening thread of steel. It vanished, crept into sight again, dusky figures grew into visibility, and the mob roared tumultuously.

"They'll get a great reception," said Captain Padget, who had come down with dispatches and stood near the girl's side.

Millicent looked at him with shining eyes as she asked, "Would any one suggest it wasn't due to them?"

"I can't very well express an opinion" said Padget, with a little laugh. "I have to keep my seat—I was there, you see. Still, one thing's quite certain. We would never have got in as we did if it hadn't been for Weland. The headman and the rest of us will not count to-day."

The colour crept into Millicent's cheeks, and there was a curious brightness in her eyes, but she turned them on a man below, who was struggling to secure a point of vantage in the crowd.

"Go down and bring him up. He can't see anything there," she said.

Padget stood still for a moment. The verandah of Government House was by no means open to everybody, and he was not prepossessed by the man's appearance.

"If you really wouldn't mind telling me why, I should!" he said.

"He is the book-keeper from Sapolto. That should be enough. If it isn't, he's a friend of mine. I met him up river."

"The last reason," said Mrs. Halifax, "would warrant you in taking a bigger risk. I have also the pleasure of Mr. Blower's acquaintance. Go along and bring him. If he does anything very dreadful you will be held responsible."

Padget did as he was bidden, and a few minutes later came back with Blower, who was not, as it happened, very much more correctly attired than he generally was in the bush. He, however, appeared in no way embarrassed, and included the headman in a comprehensive smile of greeting as Padget, who glanced at the latter deprecatingly, said, "Mr. Blower!"

"Of Sapolto!" said the book-keeper, genially. "It's the only time I have come here as a guest, and I don't quite know what you're accustomed to."

The headman smiled a little, for the fact that he came from Sapolto went a long way that day.

"Still, you suggest that you have been here before."

Blower grinned. "I have," he said. "I came in state with several files of infantry to take care of me. Your predecessor was in charge then, and he was afterwards very sorry he had ever heard of me. It was another official blunder."

"Of course!" said the headman, with his little dry smile. "They will happen every now and then. I remember hearing of the affair. Still, your employers would not have got quite so much out of the colony if it had been me. You will, I hope, make yourself quite at home, Mr. Blower."

Blower sat down at a little table and looked about, until a boy who has carrying round a tray of refreshments approached him.

"Much obliged!" he said. "You needn't worry

about taking it away. I'll keep the lot. Our better acquaintance, sir. Nobody ever gained anything by worrying the folks at Sapolto—not even King Kwaka."

The headman made a little gesture which might have expressed concurrence, but the laughter of the rest was drowned by a shout from the crowd as the head of the leading company swung out from the shadow of the palms. Then the roar grew louder as a long line of ragged men wound out into the sunlight file by file.

Major Halifax, bronzed and bull-necked, marched with them, and Millicent, who felt her heart throb and her nerves thrill, understood why his wife's arm was quivering as she leaned upon the balustrade beside her.

Then came the second company, with a handful of men rather more ragged than the rest marching in front of it, and the cries broke out again. "Well done, police! Cappy Ormond. We knew you'd do it, Tommy!"

Tommy held his head up, but he was somewhat flushed in face, and as he swung into the compound with his men he glanced up at the verandah with a little sardonic grin, and Millicent, who understood him well, smiled down at him.

"Tommy has every appearance of a man who is very much ashamed of himself," she said to Mrs. Halifax.

Mrs. Halifax's answer was drowned in a torrent of sound, for as the leading sections wheeled amidst the dust that rose from the compound a frantic outbreak of shouting greeted a white man who walked quietly with the last company.

"Weland! Cappy Weland! Too much dam fine white man. Well done, Ju-Ju!" rose the cries, and the last company was swallowed in a wildly surging mob.

Millicent's eyes grew hazy, and her lips quivered, while her cheeks were crimson when the ragged men with the rifles broke out of the press and again the tumultuous cries went up, "Well done, Weland!"

She could guess what the man's thoughts were by the

way he held himself in hand, for he stared straight in front of him and his face was almost grim, but he smiled once when, as they passed beneath the verandah, Langley, who walked beside him, laid a hand on his arm and laughed as he pointed to Blower. It was done tactfully under the eyes of every person of any consequence in the colony, and Millicent, who forgave the Commissioner a good deal, had no doubt that it was intended to have its significance. Then came more men with rifles, a screened hammock, and a long row of prisoners, with men whose bayonets glinted dazzlingly marching beside them, and last the lurching hammocks of the wounded. They passed into the compound, save the hammocks, which were carried in through an archway, and the headman stood out on the verandah stairway.

He was not demonstrative, but every quiet suggestive word was worth a score, and when the terse speech was finished there was a faint flush in the white officers' faces and the dusky soldiers were grinning delightedly, for the headman had admitted that they had done their work in a fashion which would obviate the necessity of its ever having to be done again. Then as the companies broke into fours and wheeled again he stood at the head of the stairway watching them swing away through the rolling dust, until when the last files had vanished Lieutenant Ormond stopped in front of him.

"What you were kind enough to say about my men, sir, warrants my taking a liberty," he said.

"Well," answered the headman, "perhaps it does. You have a request to make?"

"I have, sir," said Tommy. "I want to ask you for a few minutes of your time. I should also like the attendance of Mr. Commissioner Langley. The affair is, I venture to believe, of some importance."

The headman made a gesture of resignation. "Then I shall expect you in the Recorder's room in a quarter of an hour," he said.

Tommy saluted and swung round, while when he

entered the room with a big negro and Sergeant Samadu, Langley and the headman were already sitting there.

"I should like the men Commissioner Langley seized along with the rifles a little while ago brought in, sir," he said. "Then with your permission I would prefer to conduct the examination."

An order was given, and while they waited Tommy smiled at Langley, "I presume you recognize this man?" he said.

"I do," said Langley. "He is the one who escaped from the outpost soon after we seized the canoes. That is, you allowed me to believe he did."

In a few more minutes the dusky men were led in, and Tommy turned sternly to the one he had brought with him.

"Now," he said, "you know that we have chopped King Kwaka, and the Government man will very probably hang him. Any way, it's quite certain he'll never lib for king again, and you needn't be in the least afraid of him or his Ju-Ju men. If you tell the truth it's likely the Government man will give you two or three pieces of cloth instead of hanging you."

He waited for almost a minute for the negro to grasp the purport of what he said, and then asked sharply, "Who you lib for take them rifle to?"

"King Kwaka and Konnoto, sah," said the negro.

Langley made a little abrupt movement, but the headman smiled.

"I am not sure you would be gratified if I expressed astonishment at your perspicacity, Lieutenant Ormond," he said. "Will you ask the man to proceed?"

Tommy did so in his own fashion, and the negro told his tale. "One dam Ju-Ju man lib for Sapolto, and say we run away one time," he said. "Then King Kwaka send us to Konnoto, and Konnoto and them Ju-Ju man say, 'Spose you done tell any white man you lib for come back here you go get you t'roat cut. You done go tell

him you lib for Sapolto, and them dam fool Government man he no go stop you.' Tre time we lib for Falloon creek and bring rifle for Konnoto."

"I fancy that is comprehensible, sir," said Tommy.

The headman nodded. "Hadn't you better ask the others a few questions, Langley?" he said.

"Since you suggest it, sir," said Langley. "Still, I may say that I am, for my part—ah—perfectly contented."

He asked a few questions, but the answers bore out the story, and the headman smiled.

"You have our thanks, Lieutenant Ormond," he said. "It is, I think, very likely that we shall shortly offer you a more responsible command."

Tommy expressed his pleasure and went out, while ten minutes later the headman walked up to Millicent and Weland, who stood alone upon the verandah. He laid his hand on the man's shoulder and looked at him steadily with a little smile.

"We have done you a wrong, Mr. Weland," he said. "I have just heard how the rifles were brought in, and the story will, of course, be made known at the earliest moment. If there is anything else we can do we are entirely in your hands."

Weland's face had grown a trifle flushed, but he laughed. "There is nothing, sir," he said. "If there was I think I would ask you."

"That," said the headman, "is considering what has happened, a very comprehensive admission. I am not sure I could have made it quite so readily myself. Your confidence was warranted, Miss Gaskell, and I wish we had a few more men like the one who is fortunate in possessing it in the colony."

Millicent laughed softly. "It is," she said, "of course quite out of the question that there should be more than one."

"In any case I offer you both my congratulations and the colony's best thanks. I could not undertake

to decide exactly what portion of the latter is due to each of you. And now I fancy the rest are waiting."

He gave Millicent his arm, and they passed into the crowded room together, Weland walking at the headman's side. Then those who understood the little haggard man smiled, for they knew that while it was seldom he made a blunder he would go far to put one right. Millicent, who guessed their thoughts, turned and glanced at Weland with a great confidence and pride shining in her eyes.

THE END.

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